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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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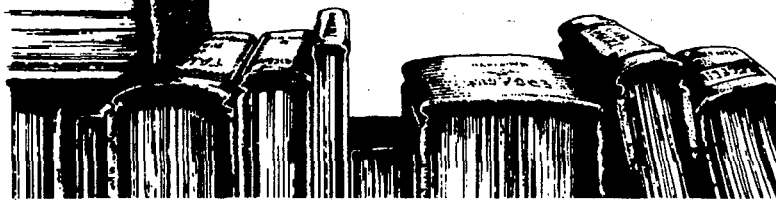

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WILLIAM BANKIER

"I have always depended on the kindness of strangers," Lorne Atterbury told the two young women . . .

IF CATS COULD SPEAK

by WILLIAM BANKIER

"Tell you one thing," Barbara Shelwin said, eyeing the rusty shower stall near the foot of one of the beds, "we check out of this place tomorrow morning."

"I feel so guilty." Rosemary Lewis stepped over suitcases and peered through the window into a garden six feet by six. "I sold you London. We'll never get another room in July."

"We'll sleep in Kensington Gardens, then."

The young women treated themselves to an expensive dinner in a Thai restaurant on the Queensway. Then they hailed a taxi and asked to be driven to the King's Road in Chelsea. Here they wandered among crowds of kids in outlandish clothes mingling with well dressed tourists like themselves. The current fad (boy or girl) seemed to be a partially shaven head with the wreckage of the hair teased and sprayed and swept into an explosion of fluorescent green or blue. Artfully torn shirts were prevalent as were tourniquet-tight denim jeans.

"More like it," Rosemary said, taking in the scene. "We are *not* on Ste. Catherine Street."

Barbara, who was missing Montreal because she had never left her son David before, said: "They do try hard."

"You should have brought your tape-recorder. You could have interviewed a few crazies for your program."

It wasn't a bad idea. She could hire a machine tomorrow and put

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together a couple of talks. Some fresh accents wouldn't go amiss on her daily hour of *Afternoon Delights*. The management was making anxious noises about high ratings on the rival radio station. "Nice one, Rosie." Barbara indicated a pub called the Duke of York, its doors open, customers spilling out all over the pavement. "Come on, I reward every good suggestion with a free drink."

They were lucky to inherit an emptying table as they struggled away from the bar with their lager-and-lime.

"Chiz," Rosemary said, imitating the accent she had been hearing since getting off the plane at Heathrow. She took her habitual heavy swallow of beer. "I'm feeling better already about that dismal room."

"Cheers. We still check out tomorrow." Barbara considered the problem. "You're a wheel at the bank. Don't you have an affiliated branch here? Somebody who could help us?"

"We do our English business through Natwest." Rosemary tried but discovered she could not wear her accountant's hat in this exotic environment. "Stop worrying about where we sleep tomorrow. Let's concentrate on tonight."

"Easy for you. You're not married."

"Single parents count as single. Don't be such a kvetch. A nine-year-old son at home in Canada will make you irresistible to these guys." Rosemary's gypsy eyes were roving the room. She made contact somewhere beyond Barbara's left shoulder and the conversation faltered.

In a patch of silence, Barbara decided to allow herself her daily ration of Ernie-hatred. Almost ten years had passed since Ernie Carpenter came up to Montreal from the Maritimes and moved in with Barbara. Letting him in seemed sensible on all counts. A low-paid journalist from a small Nova Scotia town can ill afford to rent a decent apartment. Barbara had the space and Carpenter's contribution helped with lights and food. Besides, they used to dance together in the gym after high-school football games. Had they not both been pointed toward careers, the Carpenter-Shelwin nuptials might well have been announced in the local newspaper years ago.

So Ernie lived with Barbara from May to December, which is a long, long time as the golden lyric reckons it. His leaving for a better job in Vancouver could have been coincidental despite the fact that she was a couple of months pregnant when he announced his departure. "I know somebody who can take care of that for you," he said when she told him about it. As if he was advising her on unwanted hair. "I'll pay, of course."

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"You must be joking," she said, swallowing so much bitterness at one gulp that she could still taste it here in a Chelsea pub ten years later. "I want this baby. It's you I don't want. Get on your bike."

Yesterday, leaving young David for the first time ever to fly off on a three-week holiday, Barbara had realized just how much she would miss her vulnerable son, with those sensitive eyes inherited from his father. David would be okay, of course, moving in with the family of his schoolmate, Peter. He would sit at table in a standard setting of father-mother-sister-brother. And damn Ernie Carpenter and his selfish soul forever!

"I think he's coming over," Rosemary said, turning her head in a stagey display of disinterest that revealed the delicately curved chin below the sweep of her hair.

Barbara became aware of a presence at her shoulder. She looked up and saw a man—heavy-set, prematurely grey, broad face burned by sun and wind. His attention was all on Rosemary. "Ladies, your glasses are empty," he said with elegant diction. "Please allow me to spare you the anguish of battle at the bar. All I ask in return is permission to draw up an empty chair and give this weary old frame a rest."

As he gathered glasses, Rosemary said: "That weary old frame looks good for one more night if you treat it right."

"For that," he said, "I have always depended upon the kindness of strangers." When he came back with their drinks and his own, he said: "I hasten to acknowledge the genius of Mr. Tennessee Williams in my parting remark."

Rosemary introduced herself and Barbara. The newcomer said his name was Lorne Atterbury. They were not surprised to learn he was an actor. But his candor in admitting he had hardly been offered a part in twenty years was unexpected. He lived on the money left to him by his mother when she died several years ago. "I have a *pied-à-terre* down the road," he concluded, "beside Battersea Bridge."

As closing time approached, Barbara, returning to the table with her round of drinks, was ready to confess she had seen and heard enough of Mr. Atterbury. He was crass and egotistical and he was a failure on stage because he was a lush. But it takes all kinds and for every pot there is a lid—Rosemary was feasting on the man's artificiality.

"Be my guests," he said as the drink-up bell sounded. "Come for a nightcap at my place." He smiled to include Barbara. "The both of you."

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"Come on, Barbie." Rosemary was checking the contents of her purse. "Lorne says he can recommend some hotels in this area. We need help."

Incredibly, Atterbury's place turned out to be a houseboat. They stood on Cheyne Walk at the end of the bridge and looked down across the mooring, an uneven assortment of boats side by side or end to end. Overhead lights gave the setting a carnival appearance. In some of the boats, fine furniture could be glimpsed through lamp-lit windows.

"What a magic place!" Rosemary said.

Barbara had to agree as she looked down over the dark river. "Really lovely."

"It's humble but it's home," Atterbury said in the voice of an old family retainer. "Follow me." He led them through a gate and across a gangplank onto the first of a line of steel pontoons to which the houseboats were moored. "You're lucky, the tide is out. We'd have to be even drunker than we are to fall in tonight."

Safe but scarey was the way Barbara categorized the walk to Atterbury's boat over the pontoons and across a number of railinged walkways. The glistening silt of the river bed lay several feet below. Their destination turned out to be one of a row of narrow boats near the end of the mooring.

"Converted landing-craft from the war," Atterbury said as he unlocked the door. He switched on a light and suddenly there was a green glow from the open doorway. "This mooring has lots of them and so does the other one along the embankment. Welcome aboard."

Rosemary descended three steps carefully into what looked like a kitchenette. She walked sideways, her eyes focused ahead as if fascinated by this new world she was about to enter. Barbara watched her friend out of sight and knew on the instant that she could not follow. This was as far as Barbara Shelwin went. "I'm off," she called. "See you back at the hotel."

"Aren't you coming in?" Atterbury put his head back through the doorway, managing to look and sound disappointed.

"See you later!" Rosemary's call from the interior gave her friend permission to disappear.

Barbara was surprised when she woke up and found the time was eleven-thirty. She felt rested. She turned over and saw Rosemary's bed, unused. The adventurous accountant was probably breakfasting

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somewhere along the King's Road at an outdoor table. Lorne Atterbury must have proved a success.

Barbara showered in the rusty stall, then dressed herself in light clothing for what looked to be another hot day. What was all this propaganda about the wet English summer? She went downstairs to the dining room in an Edwardian residence now become, without much alteration, a tourist hotel. Mrs. Capaldi, the owner's wife, explained it was too late for breakfast and too early for lunch. Then she sat her Canadian guest at a table near the window and went away into the kitchen. She was back in a few minutes with scrambled eggs, tomato wedges, toast, and a pot of tea—all her own work. While Barbara tucked in, Mrs. Capaldi sat opposite her, beefy bare arms resting flat on the table, and watched her eat. At some time in her life, Barbara realized, she might have enjoyed food more but she couldn't remember when.

"Careful," she told herself as she walked outside a half hour later and headed for the Bayswater Road, "before you know it you'll be satisfied with your hotel."

She spent the afternoon wandering the streets, reading the blue plaque on the house where J. M. Barrie had lived, crossing the road and entering Kensington Gardens to view the statue of Peter Pan. Sitting later in a deckchair beside the Round Pond, watching kites soaring, looking at toy boats on the water, she considered the genius of the homely little Scotsman who had created a villainous, hook-handed pirate with such a genuine soul that he could be feared and loved by generations of children and by their parents who were not eager to grow up.

Barbara thought of the drunken charmer from the pub with his floating love-nest on the Thames. Atterbury. She thought of Rosemary, who might now be back at the hotel, ready to eat, eager to check out. Or a note left on the mirror explaining where she had gone and when she would return. Set for anything, that was Rosie Lewis.

Barbara got up and wandered between giant plane trees toward the growling traffic beyond the rim of the park.

Rosemary was not in the room, nor had she been there. Everything was as Barbara had left it—garments, costume jewelry, a used towel all the same under the late-afternoon silence. Optimism tried to reassure her that her friend was with the newfound lover, having further adventures, but a stab of anxiety made itself felt all the same. Rosie was missing.

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Barbara turned the pages of a paperback book until half past five. There was no telephone in the room, but if Rosemary rang the hotel Mrs. Capaldi would summon her to the phone.

No call came. Not sure of exactly what she could be expected to do, Barbara put on a linen jacket over her dress and went outside, where she hailed a taxi and drove down through the park into Chelsea and onto the embankment and the houseboat mooring. Getting this far was easy but once she descended onto the first pontoon and looked at the massed boats in daylight, she realized she would have trouble identifying the one belonging to Lorne Atterbury.

She walked unsteadily along the deck of the main pontoon. The tide was in; the entire marine village was swaying, creaking, clanging—the hand railings on the connecting walkways were necessary now. If cats could speak (and Barbara had never been certain they could not), she might have asked the way to Atterbury's boat—there was a fat tabby or persian on every other deck. By the time she was approaching the end of the mooring, she had begun to regret coming. Rosie was more of a hazard than a companion, always had been since the day she came into the studio three years ago to take part in a program about banking. Many of her salty comments had to be edited from the tape before it could be broadcast. But Barbara had been impressed by her bold sense of humor. Rosemary was a girl who was not afraid of anything.

While she was complaining, Barbara moved on easily to Ernie Carpenter. When it was time for assigning blame, you couldn't forget old Ern. Breezing into town from down home, pouring on the charm, clearing a space for his shaving things on the bathroom window ledge, then, when the going got serious—i.e. the baby was on the way—suddenly he was green as grass, weak as a kitten, totally without guts. The only decision the bastard could make was to accept the job in Vancouver.

Barbara could go no farther—the pontoon she was balancing on was the last in the line and she could see the front doorways of the last three houseboats. They were all unrecognizable—her previous visit had been in dead of night.

She was trying to decide what to do next when Lorne Atterbury climbed up from the open doorway of the third boat from the end carrying a pair of muddy rubber boots. He knelt on the deck and, lowering one of the boots into the river, swished it about, drew it up glistening black, and began wiping it with a cloth. Barbara

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watched him clean both of the boots, wondering how to approach him, expecting Rosie to appear in the doorway at any moment.

When she did not and the middle-aged actor was preparing to carry the clean boots back inside, Barbara forced herself onto the connecting gangway, speaking as she did so. "Hello. It's me again."

He squinted at her in the glare of the late-afternoon sun. "Hello there." The response of a man who believes he has never seen you before.

"You remember. I was with Rosie in the pub last night."

"Rosie?" He stood with hands on hips and smiled at her in an engaging way. "I'm afraid you've mistaken me for somebody else. My loss."

His smile was so friendly, so genuine it chilled Barbara's blood. "You *are* Lorne Atterbury, aren't you?"

"That's my name."

"Then there's no mistake. My friend Rosemary and I were in a pub on the King's Road. Last night. You spoke to us and bought us a drink. We told you about the hotel room we didn't like—"

"I'm sorry—"

"You asked us back here for a nightcap. I didn't come in but Rosie did." Barbara let a silence grow between them, bracing herself against the surge of the tide which seemed about to fling her forward. "She hasn't come back since."

Atterbury said: "I'm sorry your friend is missing. What's her name, Rosemary? I'm sure she'll turn up."

Anger had been a long time coming, but now it boiled up and over. "Stop the performance, please. What happened to my friend? Is she inside?"

He turned sideways and welcomed her to his open doorway with arms spread wide. "Be my guest."

Barbara took two steps back. "No, thank you. Next time you see me, it'll be with the police. Would you like that? That's what you're getting."

"Feel free. I recall no friend of yours. I've nothing to hide."

Chelsea Police Station was within walking distance. Directed by locals, Barbara made her way to the squat brick building on a side street not far away. Everything in London, she was discovering, was not far away.

The uniformed man behind the desk, tall and heavy as a professional wrestler, listened to her story. His response was courteous

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disbelief. She and her friend had gone from the pub to the boat at night. Sober and in daylight, she had approached the wrong man. Not to worry, her friend would show up—they usually did. He took down the name and a description but explained that no official action could be taken for forty-eight hours. Otherwise, the police would be occupied in nothing but searches for bored people inclined to make themselves scarce for a while.

Barbara made no effort to conceal her disappointment. She was not imagining things—she had the right man and he was denying even meeting Rosemary. Something would have to be done. She left the station with a striding, slamming display of righteous North American anger.

A young, uniformed constable caught her up a few yards down the street. "I take your point," he said, "but the Sergeant is just going by the book. Can I help you—unofficially? P. C. Bell."

Barbara looked beneath the blue helmet into a clean-shaven face dominated by high cheekbones and a pair of pale-blue eyes that suggested the arrival centuries ago of Viking longboats. "All right, P. C. Bell. You can come with me to the mooring and put the fear of the law into Mr. Atterbury."

"Nothing wrong with asking a few questions. Are you Canadian?"

"Montreal."

"I almost emigrated when I finished school."

"What made you stay?"

"I belong here."

Hours of daylight remained in a bleached sky when Barbara approached Atterbury's boat for the second time. The front door was closed. Constable Bell stood on the narrow deck between a propane-gas cylinder and a tub of thriving tomato plants and rapped his knuckle on the glass. They waited. Barbara said: "What do I call you? Does it have to be Officer?"

"Call me P. C. Everybody does. It's my rank—police constable—and also my initials, Peter Charles."

"Okay, P. C. I'm Barbara."

"Be of good cheer, Barbara."

Atterbury appeared behind the glass, his eyes widening as he identified his visitor and her escort. He opened the door. "You weren't joking."

"Never mind. You may not remember me, but you sure as hell know my friend Rosemary."

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"Constable, I told this distressed person an hour ago that she is mistaking me for somebody else."

"Then how do I know your name? Are you Lorne Atterbury?"

"Yes."

The policeman said: "How do you explain that, sir?"

"I am not unknown in this neighborhood. Everybody in the pub knows me. I was there last night—we may even have had a drink together. She and her friend discovered my name. But from there on, it is confusion. They went to some other boat, not this one."

Barbara felt her anger rising again. "You must think we're crazy to accept a coincidence like that. Another boat owner in the same pub?"

"All the houseboat people drink around here."

P. C. Bell cast his eye over the mooring. "It was dark when you saw the place last night," he said. "Can you recall anything to identify this boat?"

Barbara thought about it. She saw the open doorway with Rosie disappearing down the stairs and she remembered the glow of the green light. "Yes, there was a green light inside—is this the kitchen? Right there, above the sink. I recall the green light distinctly."

"Come in," Atterbury said. "Step down carefully." He guided them down narrow wooden steps into the galley where the makings of a salad were distributed, some on a cutting board, some in a glass bowl. He reached above the stainless-steel sink and snapped a switch. A bulb glowed faintly in the daylight. It was white, contained inside a frosted-glass reflector globe. For a moment, nobody spoke.

The policeman's face was stern when he turned to Barbara, but she thought she saw disappointment in the honest eyes. "It isn't a green light," he said.

"Never has been," Atterbury said.

Barbara stared hard at the fitting. "He's changed it. It was green last night."

Atterbury shook his head. He ran a finger around the base of the fitting where the screws were plugged with paint. "I decorated in here a couple of months ago—the globe hasn't been off since."

It was the truth. Bell said: "We'll be on our way, sir. Sorry to have troubled you."

Barbara followed him onto the deck, steaming. As they walked back across the pontoon, she said: "It was him and it was that boat. I know it was."

"I want to believe you. I'm on your side, you must be able to tell."

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"I feel so embarrassed I could weep."

"Don't. The green light simply doesn't hold. So I have to suggest it's possible you have the wrong boat. Funny things happen with identification—we see it all the time. But I believe your friend is missing, and I share your concern. Okay?"

"Okay."

"I have to go on my beat now. But maybe I can ring you when I'm off duty and we can talk. About what to do."

Barbara spelled out her name and gave him the phone number of the hotel. Just before they parted, standing on Cheyne Walk with the traffic thundering past on one side and the river moving gently on the other, Lorne Atterbury came skipping up the main gangway.

"I'm going across the road to the off-license," he said, "to get a cold bottle of white wine. To have with my salad. Why don't you join me—Barbara, is it?"

Almost like the opening of *A Tale of Two Cities*, it was the best of ideas, it was the worst of ideas. If she had a conversation with Atterbury, things might fall into place. Perhaps she *was* mistaken—the green light which she had definitely seen was not part of his boat. As for any threat of danger (and she felt faint vibrations all around her), what better insurance could she have than P. C. Bell at her side, watching her as she decided to accept the invitation.

"I'll be passing this way again later in the evening," he said. "I'll look in on you."

There was her guarantee. Barbara felt a surge of excitement as she saw the frustrating matter of Rosemary's disappearance becoming something she could get her teeth into. "All right," she told Atterbury, "I'll come with you."

Atterbury seemed a different man today. He was courtly with her at the off-license, soliciting her advice before choosing the wine. Back at the houseboat, he went about the work of preparing their meal in a mood of quiet cheerfulness. The arrogant egotist of the night before was submerged somewhere, buried in the person of her modest host.

"So—how do you like my floating home?" Atterbury asked as they sat at a marble-topped table eating salad from the giant glass bowl and drinking wine.

"I'm surprised how roomy it is inside. I love it. I have a nine-year-old boy who's going to be very impressed when I tell him about it."

Atterbury was not interested in hearing about her son. "I have

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my mother to thank. When the old dear passed on, she left me the big house in Teddington. I sold it for enough to buy a flat on dry land and this sweet dwelling. Best of both worlds."

"Isn't it cold in the winter?"

"Yes, but I have my stove." He indicated a squat iron device with a glass door and a black pipe rising from it up through the ceiling. "Burns anthracite. That bunker painted blue on the deck is full of the stuff. Keeps the place warm as toast."

"You're a lucky man."

"Luck has something to do with it, I suppose." The actor looked thoughtful. "You also need a mother with property. And she must be willing to die at the proper time." He smiled and Barbara saw a glimpse of the Atterbury of the night before. "More wine?"

They took their glasses on deck to enjoy a breath of evening as the sun went down. Barbara had not forgotten Rosemary, and she said so. "When it's dark," her host said with solicitude, "I'll take you along to the other mooring, just over there by Chelsea wharf. We'll walk along the pontoons and look for the boat with your famous green light."

Barbara went inside and used the telephone. No, Rosemary had not returned to the hotel. Mrs. Capaldi sounded worried. "Do you know this girl? Does she do this kind of thing?"

Back on deck, there were two wine glasses balanced on the broad railing, catching the last rays of the sun slanting between the buildings on the far side of Cheyne Walk. Atterbury was not there. She heard his voice—he was calling to her from the far pontoon where he had taken a plastic bag of kitchen rubbish. His gesture indicated "back in a minute."

Barbara drank the rest of her wine and decided to go. P. C. Bell was due back at the end of his shift, but she was beginning to feel apprehensive. She would meet him up on the embankment by the gate. Idly, she lifted the sloping lid of the coal bunker, curious as to the appearance of the winter fuel. The receptacle was half full of shiny black fragments with a hand shovel lying on top of the heap. The shovel looked odd. Barbara lifted it out into the light. It was coated with dried mud. The connection was made in her mind automatically—Atterbury had been rinsing mud from his wading boots earlier that day! The deck heaved as dark tidewater surged under the hull of the vessel. Rosemary was down there, buried in the bed of the river. Last night, when the tide was out, Atterbury had climbed over the side and . . .

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"Chores all done," he said as he strode back over the creaking gangway. "Let's finish that bottle."

"I don't think I can have any more."

"Of course you can. You chose it." He looked at her with a snap in his eyes. "Just like a woman. Pick out a bottle of plonk and then leave me to drink it."

She knew it now. The other Atterbury was surfacing through the alcohol. The one whose mother had died conveniently. The one who would soon remember Rosemary only too clearly. Barbara looked down the mooring, searching for the reassuring shape of P. C. Bell's helmet. "I really must go."

"Not before you help with the washing up. You've had your supper, now clean up your mess."

"I don't mind helping."

She dried while he washed. His wine was seldom far from his lips. At the end of the ritual, she stood with the glass salad bowl in her hands. "Where does this go?"

"On top of the refrigerator, by the door."

She set it in place. "That's it for me, then," she said. "Thanks for the supper." He was folding and hanging the dishtowel with absolute precision as she climbed the steps to the deck.

"I'll see you off the mooring," he said, following her.

"No need." Barbara turned back and was dazzled by a sudden flash of green, the light above the sink shining through the bottle-glass of the salad bowl.

Standing beside her in the dark, he saw what she was looking at. He smiled, appreciating the perfection of the moment. "I swear to you, it never occurred to me. I really believed you meant some boat with a green light."

"Rosie was here. What did you do?"

"What are *you* going to do?"

"Bring back the police."

He took hold of her wrist, not hurting her, just preventing her departure. "People fall off these boats," he said. "The other morning, a baby in diapers, a crawler, fell off the one at the far end. Right down into the silt. You should have heard the crying, the yelling, the slamming of doors, dogs barking—it was pandemonium. One muddy baby carried back up onto the deck. Lucky for him the tide was out."

She twisted free. "I'm going now."

"No, you're not."

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Both hands this time, on her shoulders, reaching for her face. Barbara broke his grip and took hold of the collar of his shirt. It ripped in her hands and she grabbed again, feeling sweaty skin, tendons beneath it.

She locked on. Why was she not screaming? They were both breathing hard, feet tottering on the moving deck. His hands took various holds on her body and kept changing for new ones. She retained her grip on his throat.

It came through to Barbara suddenly that she was stronger than this man, and more determined. She was winning the fight. She roughed him back against the railing and he went where she drove him, his back striking hard against the bar. He gasped and slipped to one knee. The blow on the spine had hurt him, but to Barbara it felt good. She could kill this swine! She *ought* to kill him. He had murdered Rosemary and buried her out there under the water. She could keep squeezing till he stopped breathing. She could slam his head against the deck like a rag doll. He was no better than Ernie Carpenter . . . weak . . . useless . . . couldn't count on anybody . . .

Atterbury began to scream in time with his head striking the deck. They were the screams of a woman—high, short, piercing screams. On boats down the mooring, figures appeared in doorways. A voice called: "Leave off, lady! Get a divorce!"

P. C. Bell arrived on the run. He took hold of Barbara's wrists and broke her grip. She sank back onto her haunches and showed him a face he could hardly recognize. Then the rage poured out of her, followed by tears as she pointed with childish pride across the policeman's shoulder. "He killed her—she's buried in the river. And there is my green light!"

P. C. Bell showed up at the hotel at midday in plainclothes. Mrs. Capaldi took him to Barbara's table and left them alone. He was looking solemn.

"They found her body—where you said. I'm afraid you'll have to come and identify her."

"All right." Barbara was not eating. She was trying to drink coffee.

"Then what? Going home, I suppose?"

"What for? My plane ticket is for three weeks. I may as well stay here."

"Can I see you?"

"Can you bear it?"

"I'm not with you."

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Barbara Shelwin raised her eyes and looked at P. C. Bell from the frightening depths of her self-awareness. "Two minutes later and you'd have had to arrest me for killing Lorne Atterbury."

"Speculation," he said.

"Certainty," she told him. "I was enjoying it too much ever to have stopped on my own."

"I don't know what to say to that."

"Say I'm like everybody else. That it could never happen again. Say you forgive me."

"That's the difficult part," the young policeman said. "You must learn how to forgive yourself."

DETECTIVERSE

DEPARTING PARTNER

by NOLEN HARSH

I once had a partner who smiled a lot—
His demeanor was pleasant and sunny.
I finally learned the source of his glee
When he flew to Brazil with my money.

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a *NEW* Selena Mead story by

PATRICIA McGERR

As a diplomat's daughter and wife of a distinguished scientist, Anna Kolchek must have had experience in affairs of this type, but Selena sensed a tension, a kind of nervous excitement that seemed to confirm Hugh's judgment: this was not just an ordinary party for the press—Mrs. Kolchek was here for a purpose more important than public relations.

A story that will please not only the wide circle of Patricia McGerr fans, but also those of Stanley Ellin . . . !

NUMBERS GAME

by PATRICIA McGERR

Selection of Dr. Josef Kolchek as winner of the gold medal of the World Science Academy presented his government with an agonizing decision. A small country nestled in one of the folds of the Iron Curtain, it received little notice from beyond its borders. So the high honor bestowed on one of its citizens was a source of pride to all. On the other hand, Dr. Kolchek was an independent thinker who did not hesitate to speak his mind. Although he had not strayed far enough from party doctrine to be labeled a dissident, his criticisms often embarrassed the men in power and encouraged the opposition. Lesser men might have been silenced or at least warned against further indiscretion, but the doctor was, because of his unique talents and the great importance of his work to the state, allowed more freedom of expression. His candor had to be indulged as one of the eccentricities of genius.

Recently, however, there had been a crisis at the company where Kolchek served as director of research and development. About two months before the WSA award was announced, one of the employees

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was caught passing scientific data to a foreign agent. He was a low-level maintenance worker who had only superficial contact with the director, so there was no reason to suspect Kolchek's involvement. But it was one more mark against him which, combined with his unorthodox opinions, caused the regime to greet news of the award with mixed emotions. To add to their unease, the site of this year's ceremony at which the medal would be conferred was Washington, D.C.

The debate over allowing him to make the trip was long and heated. In the end, those in favor prevailed. To refuse permission, they argued, would not only wipe out the award's propaganda value but project an image of a repressive society. Also, it would insult Dr. Kolchek and might, by implying doubt of his loyalty, become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Perhaps the most persuasive argument was the scientist's inability to speak any language but his own. It would not be difficult during a twenty-four-hour stay in Washington to keep him isolated from all unauthorized contacts. His brief acceptance speech would be prepared and carefully censored in advance.

Permission was also given for his wife to accompany him, but their three children would remain at home. Although the word "hostage" was never mentioned, both sides understood that the youngsters were a pledge of their parents' good behavior.

The arrival of the Kolcheks in Washington was also of great interest to the U.S. intelligence network, including the branch known as Section Q, headed by Hugh Pierce. His breakfast on the morning of the award ceremony was interrupted by a phone call. When he returned to the table, Selena had finished eating and was pouring a second cup of coffee.

"What's your day like?" he asked her. "Busy?"

"Not especially," she answered. "I plan to go up to the Senate to get some quotes for my article on education. But that can wait until tomorrow if you have an alternative suggestion."

"Mrs. Kolchek is meeting the press at the embassy this afternoon."

"*Mrs.* Kolchek?" Selena looked at him with tilted brows. "If her husband schedules a press conference, I'll certainly be there. But you know I don't do social notes."

"No reporter, or anyone else, is going to get a chance to question the doctor," he returned. "His only public appearance will be at the Science Academy's session this evening. He'll walk up to the plat-

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form, accept his medal, read his speech, and fly home. The rest of the time he'll be kept under wraps."

"Yet they're going to let the press in to talk with his wife. Doesn't that seem inconsistent?"

"It's a tea party," Hugh explained, "where they can limit the topics to food, family, and frivolity. Anna Kolchek is a diplomat's daughter who learned English while her father was stationed in India. They say she's attractive and very bright, so putting her on display is good public relations. You can be sure, though, that the conversation will be carefully monitored and kept away from any serious discussion."

"And from the midst of the food, family, and frivolity, you think that some thought will emerge that will interest the readers of a serious magazine like mine?"

"Probably not."

"Then why—oh, I see." She looked at him accusingly over the rim of her cup. "You're sending me on an errand for Section Q. You expect this tea party to produce useful intelligence data."

"It's a slim hope," he acknowledged, "but it's the only one we have. Dr. Kolchek has been working on a naval detection device that's nearly perfected. We had an agent-in-place who was getting information from him, but our man got careless and was arrested. Luckily, they didn't discover his link with Kolchek, but it dried up our only source and put them on even greater guard against leaks. At the time of the arrest they were about to start tests to determine the device's range. So the one piece of vital information we still need is the number of miles within which it can operate with accuracy."

"Is that the answer I'm supposed to get over tea and cakes this afternoon?"

"Exactly. The doctor knows we're missing the mileage figure. He also knows his wife's tea party is the only chance either of them will have to tell us anything. So it's then or never."

"Is there a signal by which I'm supposed to identify myself and let her know that I'm there as your representative?"

"No." He shook his head. "There can't be any covert communication between you and her. You'll be there as just one more member of the press. However she plans to get the figure across to us, it will have to be buried in a statement she makes to the entire group. The Kolcheks will give us credit for realizing the importance of this gathering, but they won't count on our ability to have one of our own people present. So they'll assume that if the crucial figure isn't

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quoted in tomorrow's newspapers, we can get it from the reporters' notes and tapes."

"In their country," Selena said, "that's probably routine. But can you imagine the uproar such a request would set off in the press here?"

"That's why you have to be there," Hugh told her. "Listen closely to every word the lady says and write down the magic number."

"I'll get it on tape," she assured him. "No doubt the embassy will do the same. The first part of her task will be easy enough. I can think of a dozen ways a number can be inserted into the usual wife-of-a-great-man interview. 'Do you entertain much?' is a standard question. She can answer, 'Yes, I often have ten guests to dinner.' Or, 'No, I'm early to bed, never up after nine.' Or, 'I serve a special salad that contains eleven vegetables.' Then you'll have your mileage. But if she's as bright as you say she is, she must realize the risk in giving it to you could endanger her whole family."

"How do you mean?"

"While we listen to my tape, somebody in authority will listen to theirs. They know the device Dr. Kolchek is working on. They know its range and they know our agent was arrested before he could pass on that figure. They are also aware of how useful that information can be to us. No matter how harmless-sounding the sentence into which Mrs. Kolchek fits that number, it's going to seem much too much of a coincidence when they hear her give it to the foreign press. Do you really expect her to take such a risk?"

"It does seem unreasonable," he conceded. "And no doubt you're right about the risk. But the Kolcheks must have encouraged, perhaps even initiated, the plan for her to talk to the press. We have to wonder why. It's unlikely she'd want to help their propaganda. So there's no reason for her to participate unless she intends to use it to convey information. As for the danger—well, he's a highly intelligent and inventive man. His wife, I'm told, is a good match for him. We'll just have to trust her to find a way to answer our question without the other side knowing that she's done so. If she can't, you'll have wasted your afternoon. But it's worth the gamble."

The embassy was under tight security. Selena's press credentials were scrutinized and the contents of her handbag inspected before she was admitted to the drawing room, where she was greeted by the ambassador's wife and presented to the guest of honor. Mrs. Kolchek was a slender woman with softly waved brown hair. Her

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features were plain except for greenish-blue eyes whose liveliness supported her reputation for intelligence. Her dark-blue suit, though not expensive, showed taste and style. As a diplomat's daughter and wife of a distinguished scientist, she must have had experience in affairs of this type, but Selena sensed a tension, a kind of nervous excitement that seemed to confirm Hugh's judgment. This was, for Anna Kolchek, not just an ordinary party for the press. She was here for a purpose more important than public relations.

Selena's own negative appraisal of the event's news value was supported by the fact that only three other journalists, all female, were present. They were outnumbered by the embassy staff, which included a social secretary, a press attaché, an interpreter, and two anonymous women, who stayed, unintroduced, in the background. One sat in a chair close behind Mrs. Kolchek, the other in front, facing her and paying close attention to everything she said, every move she made. Guards and censors, Selena thought. They're here to make very sure that there is no deviation from the party line and no betrayal of secrets. Whatever plan Mrs. Kolchek has made for feeding us information, she'll be wise to forget it.

The interpreter was clearly superfluous except as one more monitor of the spoken words. Mrs. Kolchek's own English was slightly accented but fluent and idiomatic. She answered the standard questions, and many of her answers contained numbers. Selena started her tape recorder and, as backup, wrote them all in her notebook. She was forty-one years old and had been married for nineteen years. They had three children, two boys and one girl. Their ages were seventeen, eleven, and seven. This was her third visit to the United States, the second time she had been in Washington. The last visit lasted four days. There was even, as predicted, a question about entertaining. Although she used none of Selena's sample answers, a follow-up request for information about a national dish produced a recipe in which she itemized cups, tablespoons, teaspoons, and even pinches. So many numbers, Selena thought, and no way to tell which, if any, has special significance. It may be true that the best place to hide a leaf is in a forest, but not if you ever want anyone to find the leaf again.

The tea was hot, the cakes delicious, and the atmosphere pleasant. One question about Dr. Kolchek's research caused the guardians in the background to stir and lean forward. But they were immediately put at ease by her response.

"I know nothing about my husband's work," she told them. "When

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he closes the door of his laboratory, he leaves it all behind him and never talks about it at home. That's just as well, since, being very unscientific, I wouldn't understand any of it."

Is that answer, Selena wondered, intended only to reassure the official listeners or does it also contain a message for U.S. intelligence? Is it her way of saying that she has given up, that she can't, in the circumstances, tell us what we want to know?

The questions then returned to Mrs. Kolchek's own activities and she spoke with enthusiasm about her volunteer work at a children's hospital, then added, "But I must not give you the impression that my life is all service and sobriety. I will tell you my secret." Again the guards stirred and she smiled mischievously. "I am addicted to mystery novels. Yes, it is true. I read them avidly. If I could stay longer in your city, I would go to the bookstores and shop for my favorite authors."

"Will you tell us their names?" Selena asked.

"Some are British," she replied. "A. Conan Doyle, of course, for the great Sherlock Holmes. Then there is John Buchan, Graham Greene, and Dorothy L. Sayers. The others are American—Earl Derr Biggers, Ellery Queen, and the one I like best of all—Stanley Ellin."

"How do you spell that?" one of the other reporters asked.

"E-l-l-i-n." Mrs. Kolchek beamed at her. "If you haven't read his books, I strongly recommend that you look them up."

The questions continued on another subject and Selena, hardly listening, waited impatiently for the press attaché to signal that the time was up, the party over. She said her goodbyes quickly and hurried home.

Hugh was waiting for her.

"How'd it go?" he asked. "Did you get anything?"

"I think so." She handed him the tape and left him to listen to it while she put away her coat.

"This thing is loaded with numbers," he complained when she returned to join him in the soundproofed den. "How are we supposed to pick out the one that matters?"

"None of them do," she answered. "Mrs. K. is a wise woman. She knew better than to put the information into words."

"Then what did she use? Sign language?"

"Of course not." She took the machine from him and pushed a button that sped it forward through most of the conference. She stopped it at the statement, "I'm addicted to mystery novels."

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"This is a subject that *Mrs. Kolchek* introduced," Selena explained. "Through the rest of the conference she simply answered questions, let the interviewers choose the topics. But in this segment she took charge and told us what she wanted us to hear. And she picked a field in which we'd be able to find meanings that are hidden from her compatriots."

She switched on the machine again to let Hugh listen to the names of the British authors.

"Doyle, Buchan, Greene, and Sayers," he repeated. "Are they supposed to add up to something?"

"What do you associate with John Buchan?" she asked.

"He was Governor General of Canada."

"Yes, he was, but the present context is literary."

"He wrote *The Thirty-Nine Steps*."

"And Graham Greene?"

"The movie with the zither music—*The Third Man*."

"And Conan Doyle wrote *The Sign of the Four,* while two of Dorothy Sayers' titles are *Nine Tailors* and *Five Red Herrings*."

"Up to here," Hugh said, "I'm following you. The lady has suggested a list of books with numbers in the titles. But I still don't see—"

"She had to be subtle, lead up to it gradually," Selena told him. "The important part comes next. Her American favorites are Earl Derr Biggers—"

"Charlie Chan. Did he solve a murder with numbers?"

"It's possible. But Biggers is also the author of *Seven Keys to Baldpate*. The next author she mentioned was Ellery Queen. He wrote so many books there may be more than one numerical title, but the one that comes to my mind first is *Ten Days' Wonder*."

"So far," Hugh grumbled, "you've given me seven different figures. Do we add, subtract, divide, or multiply?"

"Have patience," she admonished. "I'm building up to a climax, because that's where we're going to need outside help."

"What do you—"

"Shh. Just listen." Again she adjusted the tape so that he could hear Mrs. Kolchek say, "Earl Derr Biggers, Ellery Queen, and the one I like best of all—Stanley Ellin." "How do you spell that?" "E-l-l-i-n. If you haven't read his books, I strongly recommend that you look them up."

"The one she likes best of all," Hugh mused. "And she wants us

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to look him up. So that has to be the clue. A book by Stanley Ellin. What did he write besides 'Specialty of the House'?"

"I'm familiar only with his short stories," Selena answered. "But she made it clear she was talking about novels. We'll have to consult a specialist."

"Do you have someone in mind?"

"Joe Zimmer, of course. He really is a mystery addict."

She consulted her directory, picked up the phone, and dialed. On the third ring a deep voice said, "Yes. Zimmer here."

"Joe, it's Selena." After a brief social exchange, she came to the point. "I know you're an authority on crime fiction, so I hope you can help me. A friend recommended I read a novel by Stanley Ellin, but I can't remember the title."

"Probably 'Specialty of the House,' " he answered promptly and then corrected himself. "But you said a novel, didn't you? His latest is *The Dark Fantastic.*"

"No, that's not the one."

"Hold on a second. Let me get my bible."

"Your bible?"

"Barzun and Taylor's *Catalogue of Crime.* I keep it always at hand." There was a brief pause and then he was back on the phone. "Here it is. Now let's see. Ellin, Stanley. Was it *The Key to Nicholas Street?*"

"No."

"The Valentine Estate? The House of Cards? The Eighth Circle?"

"That's the one!" Selena said, knowing there would be only one Ellin title with a number in it. "Joe, you're a lifesaver. Thanks a million."

She put down the phone and turned back to Hugh.

"Ellin's book is *The Eighth Circle.* So the device has a range of eight miles."

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a *NEW* Horace Rumpole story by

JOHN MORTIMER

"I'll book up," Hilda said.

"Not yet," Rumpole told her, and thought to avoid further argument with a perfectly safe bet. "We'll go," he promised, "if I win R versus Gimlett. We'll go as a celebration."

Hilda appeared, for the moment, to be satisfied and Rumpole knew that never, in his whole career, had there been such a certain loser as the case of the gentle greengrocer of Kilburn . . .

RUMPOLE AND THE WINTER BREAK

by JOHN MORTIMER

"What you need, Rumpole, is a break."

My wife Hilda, known to me only as She Who Must Be Obeyed, was, of course, perfectly correct. I did need a break—a bit of luck—like not all my cases being listed before Judge Roger Bullingham, the Mad Bull of the Old Bailey, and not being led by an ineffective Q.C. named Moreton Colefax, and not being prosecuted by Sam Ballard, the Savonarola of our Chambers. And not having as a client in my current little murder a short-sighted Kilburn greengrocer who admitted placing his hands about his wife's throat to reason with her, whereupon she dropped dead and he concealed her body for some time in a large freezer in the stockroom—that is, until he lost his nerve and called on the Old Bill.

"Of course, I need a break, Hilda. Anyone would think the Bull's the only judge left down the Bailey."

"Not that sort of break. I mean a *winter* break. Now for 236 pounds each, we could have seven nights on Spain's Sunshine Coast with

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sea view, poolside barbecue, sports facilities, and excursions, including cocktails aboard the hotel's old-time pirate galleon. Dodo's been to Marbella, Rumpole, and we never have a winter holiday."

"Oh, yes," I said. "I can see your old school friend Dodo Mackintosh with a cutlass between her teeth, shinning up the ratlines to board the pirate galleon for a complimentary cocktail."

"I'll book up," Hilda said.

"Not yet," I told her, and thought to avoid further argument with a perfectly safe bet. "We'll go," I promised, "if I win R versus Gimlett. We'll go as a celebration."

Hilda appeared, for the moment, to be satisfied and I knew that never, in the whole Rumpole career, had there been such a certain loser as the case of the gentle greengrocer of Kilburn.

"It's true, is it not," I asked Professor Ackerman, pathologist par excellence and uncrowned King of the Morgues, across a crowded courtroom a few days later, "that a very slight pressure on the vagal nerve at the throat may stop the heart and death may follow speedily?"

"That would be so," the Professor agreed. He and I had discussed many a deceased person together, and so over the years, although always opponents, we had achieved some sort of rapport. "But of course, my Lord, as Mr. Rumpole knows, the pressure would have to be just in the right spot."

"Of course Mr. Rumpole knows that!" The Bull lowered his head in my direction and pawed the ground a little. "Are you suggesting that your client sought out the right spot and pressed on it?"

"Certainly not, my Lord. He pressed on it by the sort of accident your Lordship or any of us might have, pressing on a gold collar-stud, say, putting on a winged collar before the start of a day in Court."

"*That* sort of pressure?" I could see the Bull pale beneath his high blood-pressure and a nervous but stubby finger went to the space between the purplish folds of his neck and his off-white starched stand-up size nineteen. "Do you mean by a *collar stud?*" he asked the Professor.

"I think Mr. Rumpole is exaggerating a little." Ackerman gave me the tolerant smile he might reserve for a favorite pupil who had, for once, gone a little too far. "But the pressure could be comparatively slight."

"Mr. Rumpole is exaggerating!" His Honor Judge Bullingham,

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Senior Old Bailey Judge and as such entitled to try murders, seemed to be remembering my previous convictions. "That doesn't surprise me in the least." And he gave the jury one of his well known meaningful smiles. No doubt it frightened the wits out of them.

"The sort of pressure which might arise if a man put his hand round his wife's neck for the purpose of restraining her?" I asked the witness.

"*Restraining* her, Mr. Rumpole?"

"Oh, yes, my Lord. Restraining her from attacking him in one of her frequent outbursts of fury. Restraining her from following him into the shop and abusing him in front of the clientele as he weighed out a couple of pounds of Golden Delicious."

I got a small titter from the jury, a cry of "Silence!" from the usher, a glare from the Bull, and an absolutely charming answer from the fair-minded forensic expert.

"If he restrained her with some force, the vagal nerve might be inhibited, particularly if she were pressing against his hand. I suppose that is possible, yes."

"Thank you, Professor!" And I sat down silently, wishing the pale Ackerman a long life and happy dissecting.

But why was I, Horace Rumpole, a junior barrister in status if not in years (I go back to the dawn of time, when Lord Denning was a stripling Judge in the Divorce Division), why was I, who had a none-too-learned leader in the shape of Moreton Colefax, Q.C., cross-examining the pathologist called by the Crown? The short answer was that Colefax, after a long delay, had been called to higher things—i.e., the Bench—and as our timid client appeared to feel safe in the Rumpole hands, I was left in the firing line, a target for the Bull's blunderbuss and the sniping of my opponent and fellow member of Chambers, Sam Ballard, Q.C.

"You say your married life was unhappy, Mr. Gimlett?" Ballard started his cross-examination when the prisoner at the bar gave evidence.

"She had a terrible temper when roused." Gimlett looked at the jury in a woebegone sort of way. "Her chief delight seemed to be to show me up in front of my customers. Screaming! They say you could hear it all the way down to Sainsburys."

"You have some experience of married life, though, haven't you? You have been married before?"

"My Lord. What on earth can be the relevance . . .?" I reared to my hind legs to protest and the Bull bared his teeth in some sort of

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a grin. "I don't know, Mr. Rumpole. Unless Mr. Ballard is trying to suggest that your client is something of a Casanova."

Ballard passed swiftly on to other matters and abandoned that line of cross-examination, but I sat in a sort of glow because the Bull had delivered himself into my hands. Nothing in the world could have looked less like Casanova than the meek and middle-aged Harold Gimlett, with his pinkish bald head and National Health specs, who looked out of place without a brown overall, a slightly running nose, and cold hands among the Jersey potatoes. I would make him, before I had finished with the jury, the very image and archetype of the henpecked husband.

"Members of the jury," I told them in my final speech. "My client has been presented to you as a Casonova, a Valentino, even (I had got the name from Miss Fiona Allways, the youngest member of our Chambers) a Jagger. Look at him! Can you imagine teenagers swooning over him at the airport? (Laughter, at which the Bull growled menacingly.) Is he a Lothario or a Bluebeard? Does he fill you with terror, members of the jury, or is he simply a put-upon, timid, and long-suffering human being who only wanted peace in his home and prosperity for his little grocery business? Of course, after this terrible accident, when he managed to make contact with his wife's neck in that way he never dreamt could be so dangerous, he lost his head. For a futile moment, he tried to conceal the body in that freezing cabinet you have all seen in the photograph, but soon he was his honest, straightforward self again and walked, of his own free will, into Kilburn police station, anxious only to face you ladies and gentlemen of the jury, and receive justice at your hands . . ."

"You look tired, Mr. Rumpole. You need a holiday."

We sat together, Harold Gimlett and my learned self, in the cells under the Old Bailey, waiting for the jury to come back with a verdict. Such times are always embarrassing. You don't quite know what to say to a client. You could say, "Win a few, lose a few," or, "See you again, in about fifteen years," but such remarks would be scarcely welcome. On this occasion it was the greengrocer who kept up the small talk.

"I've always enjoyed a holiday," he said. "Things happen sometimes, on a holiday."

"What sort of things?"

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"Well, for instance. It was on holiday that I met the ladies who became my wives."

I left him then and paced up and down outside the Court, smoking a small cigar and nervously dropping ash down the front of the waistcoat. I don't know why, after so many years of waiting for juries to return, it never gets any better. The sad face of Sam Ballard, my devout prosecutor, hove into view.

"Ballard," I said. "Why did you embark on that line about the previous wife? I mean, she died quite naturally, didn't she?"

"Natural causes, yes," he agreed in a sepulchral tone. "With quite a hefty life insurance made out in your client's favor. As was the case with the last Mrs. Gimlett."

"The trouble with you members of the Lawyers as Christians Society," I told him, "is that you have the most morbidly suspicious minds."

What he said had unsettled me a little, I confess. I felt a momentary sense of insecurity, but within ten minutes the jury, to the Bull's evident chagrin, returned to find Harold Gimlett Not Guilty. It was only then, and with a sickening heart, that I remembered the promise I had made to She Who Must Be Obeyed. I would have to explain to her, gently no doubt, but absolutely firmly, that after such a triumph in the Courts I had no sort of need of a winter break.

Three weeks later, we had checked in at Gatwick Airport, en route to the Costa del Sol.

"What you will find in the Hotel Escamillo, Mr. and Mrs. Rumpole, is never a dull moment. We lay on the usual wet-suit water skiing on clear days—all that sort of activity. Hardly your line, Mr. Rumpole, is it? Well, you'll be well pleased with the miniature golf, the bingo, and the bowling green. We offer a full day taking in Gibraltar and a packed lunch. The caves, now—that makes a very nice excursion. And the hotel offers the Carmen Coffee Shop, the Mercedes Gourmet French Restaurant, the Michaela for snacks and grills, and the usual solarium and gym equipment if you want to keep in trim, Mr. Rumpole."

"No, thank you. I have no desire whatever to keep in trim."

"And for Mrs. Rumpole, the beauty parlor—not that you need *that,* Mrs. Rumpole. I must say we all, in hospitality, take particular care of our more mature ladies. Tonight, just as a for instance, there's a senior citizens' happy hour in the Don José American Bar. Any

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problems at all and you come straight to me. My name's Derek and I'm happy to host your stay."

I could tell his name was Derek because he had it written in gold letters on a plastic label attached to his green blazer. He had soft brown eyes and a sort of Spanish style gaucho moustache, although his accent was pure Ealing Broadway.

"Now, have you any questions at all, Mrs. Rumpole? Mr. Rumpole?"

"Yes," I said. "Where can I get *The Times?*"

"The Frasquita Drug Store on the mezzanine floor," Derek told me, "is continually at your service."

But when I got there, they had nothing left but the *Mirror* and the *Sun*. I found the crosswords in those periodicals extremely puzzling.

"I don't know about you, Rumpole," said She Who Must Be Obeyed, "but I intend to take full advantage of all the facilities provided."

"Pity I've got a touch of leg coming on." I limped elaborately a few steps behind Hilda on the way to the lift. "But of course I want *you* to enjoy the full day in Gibraltar."

So our days fell into a sort of pattern. The sun rose palely behind the tower blocks of the hotels, which in their turn cast a dark shadow upon the strip of beach. Each morning we took the continental in the bedroom, as the Escamillo version of the full British breakfast arrived very cold and greasy, as though it had been flown out, tourist class, from England. I usually woke tired—the bedroom walls seemed made of thinnish hardboard and the young family in the next room apparently enjoyed round games and pop music far into the night. Hilda was always in a hurry to get ready, to find her purse, her straw peasant-style shopping basket, her hardly needed sunhat and shaded specs, because the day's tour, or expedition, was always assembling—it seemed round dawn—in the foyer, to be taken by Derek on a bus journey to some distant point of interest.

I would skulk in bed until She had set out, and then get up slowly and wait for the hot water, which apparently also arrived from a long way off. Once togged up in a pair of old flannels and a tweed jacket, I would leave the delights of the Escamillo Hotel, avoiding the group of men in floral shirts at the poolside bar, who, judging from the seriousness of their conversation, might have been planning a new supermarket, or a raid on the Midland Bank in Hounslow. I would walk, my leg having rapidly recovered, into a sort of

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village where there were still dark and narrow streets, a dripping fountain, and a square.

On the square was a dark shop—a jumble of tinned food, paperback books, airbeds, and shrimping nets—kept by an old woman in a black dress, with a gold tooth and a stubby moustache, who managed to save me, miraculously, copies of *The Times*. I would then go and sit in the comforting, incense-filled gloom of the church and do the crossword. Once it was finished, I transferred my patronage to a small, tiled bar which smelled of carbolic soap and wet dogs, where I ate shrimps, drank a red wine which bore about the same relationship to Pommeroy's plonk as Chateau Thames Embankment does to Latour 1961, and read my way backwards from the obituaries to the front-page news.

I was always back at the hotel in time to meet Hilda, who arrived home footsore and very weary, with her basket full of fans, mantillas, bullfighting posters, sword-shaped paper knives, and other trophies of the chase. We had dinner together, and after a terrible encounter with an antique hen lurking under a sweetish sauce, which called itself Caneton à l'Orange, in the Mercedes Gourmet Restaurant we patronized the Michaela for snacks and grills. Every evening, Hilda would recount the adventures of the day, repeat several of Derek's jokes, and tell me of the friendliness shown to her by everyone, but particularly by a Mr. Waterlow, a visitor from England.

"Quite obviously a seasoned traveler. He came into the shop with me and managed to beat them down quite marvelously over the mantilla I bought as a present for Dodo Mackintosh."

"I always thought old Dodo would look a lot better heavily veiled."

"What did you say?"

"You were going to tell me where you sailed . . ."

"Sailed? We didn't sail anywhere, Rumpole. We went on a bus. Mr. Waterlow sat at my table at lunch in the Parador. Such a charming man and so distinguished-looking. He wears one of those white linen shirts with short sleeves. What do you call them? Bush-whacking shirts?"

I said I didn't call them anything.

"I think it's bush-whacking. Anyway, you ought to get a shirt like that, Rumpole."

"Did you happen to tell this Waterlow person that you were here with your husband?"

"Oh, Rumpole! We didn't talk about *my* life. I don't suppose he even knows my name. He told me a little about himself, though. He

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says he's all alone in the world now. He does seem rather sad about it."

So life continued, and each evening Hilda regaled me with her travels round the Iberian peninsula and told me of the charm and general helpfulness of the man Waterlow. Strangely, we never saw him about the hotel. He knew, Hilda told me, a lot of little restaurants along the coast. "Places where the continentals go, Rumpole. But then, of course, Mr. Waterlow speaks absolutely perfect Spanish."

On the last but one night of our stay, dinner was laid out in the nippy darkness beside the pool. The ladies pulled on cardigans over thin dresses, men brought out sweaters, and a group of shifty-looking customers in big hats and frilly shirts sang "Deep in the Heart of Texas" and such like old Spanish folksongs. Derek was table-hopping—telling his jokes and flirting in a nauseating manner with the female senior citizens—when Hilda looked up from a battle with a slice of singed bull which had no doubt weathered a good many corridas and almost shrieked, "Why, Rumpole, there he is!"

"There who is?"

"Why, Mr. Waterlow, of course."

I saw him then, sitting among the group who were often poolside with their ladies. He raised his sangria when she looked at him, but when he saw me he seemed to freeze, his glass an inch from his lower lip.

"Hilda," I said with all the determination I could muster, "you must *never* speak to that man again!"

I looked back and he had gone, out of the poolside lights perhaps, and was still lingering in the shadows.

"But why, Rumpole? Whyever do you say that?"

I couldn't tell her about the man with whom she had struck up a friendship. Even if he had changed his name, substituted contact lenses for National Health specs and a safari suit and a gold medallion for a greengrocer's overall, I knew exactly who he was. I may have cherished uncharitable thoughts about She Who Must Be Obeyed at times when a cold wind was blowing around Casa Rumpole, but I never wanted to see her end up in a freezer cabinet.

"Why mustn't I speak to him again?"

"Because I say so."

"Rumpole, you silly old thing." Hilda's face was wreathed in

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smiles. She looked some years younger, and intensely flattered. "I do believe you're jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Of Mr. Waterlow. It's so silly, Rumpole. But it's nice to know that you really care as much as that. I do think that's awfully nice to know." She's eyes were smiling. She put out her hand and took mine in a fairly moist embrace.

"You know there's no one else really, don't you? Mr. Waterlow was very charming, what I really liked about him was he made you jealous! Would you like to dance with me, Rumpole?"

"No, Hilda." I disengaged my hand as gently as possible. "I don't really think I would."

The next day was our last and Hilda foreswore all trips. She came with me when I bought *The Times* and sat beside me in the church, making some unhelpful suggestions for one across. I didn't take her to the tiled bar, but we chose a restaurant by the sea, where we ate calamaris, food that tasted much like india-rubber teething rings. Hilda was smiling and cheerful all day. Harold Gimlett, the Kilburn greengrocer, seemed to have greatly improved my married life by giving Rumpole an undeserved reputation as a jealous husband.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

FOR THE DEFENSE

by SHARLYA GOLD

Fearless Rumpole of the Bailey
Faces crime and menace daily.
Yet at home he's sore afraid
Of She Who Must Be Obeyed.

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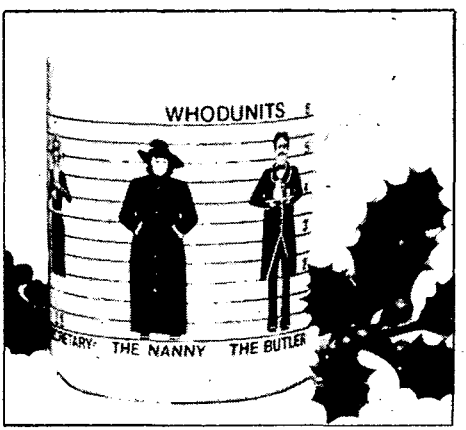

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The following story, set at the Summer Olympics in Los Angeles, goes to press in June, weeks before the Games are due to begin. It will be interesting to see if the real athletes in the story perform as the author predicts they will.

As for the author himself, J. L. Pouvoir is the pseudonym of a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist. Harvard, Navy, wife, and two small children. We are very proud to bring you his first fiction. Detective stories aren't easy to write but he has written an extraordinarily adept one his first time out . . .

THE DEATH TRIPLE

by J. L. POUVOIR

Strider had felt the legs coming undone on Rodeo Road, half a dozen miles from the Coliseum. No mystery there; every distance man ran out of glucose and met The Wall after he'd gone twenty.

Two miles later he'd sensed what Don Kardong had described at Montreal—"As if my vital organs were dropping out onto the street one by one." No novelty there, either. You ran the final four miles of an Olympic marathon on memory and instinct. Legs, lungs, and other moving parts became irrelevant.

Plodding down Exposition Boulevard, Strider felt reason leave him, too. The medals were impossible now. DeCastella was already inside the Coliseum, a minute from winning the gold for Australia. Shahanga of Tanzania was sprinting down the tunnel thirty seconds back, certain of the silver.

Salazar, the doe-eyed thoroughbred from the Boston suburbs, would take the bronze. An Englishman, a Portuguese, a Japanese were strung out behind at hundred-yard intervals. Strider, the second American, was seventh and nowhere.

The streetside faces had gone blurry on him, their voices blended

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to a babble. Half a mile to go now, his eyes losing focus, chest hurting terribly, pain surging everywhere, sky spinning, legs buckling, the pavement coming up to meet him . . .

The man from the IOC medical commission, a Belgian prince, met the world press at 9 P.M., one hour after the medals had been awarded, the flags hoisted, the Australian anthem played. A terrible thing, he said, a dreadful day for the Games.

Strider of the United States had collapsed and expired two hundred yards from the Coliseum. Cause of death believed to be a myocardial infarction. In layman's terms, a heart attack. Unusual, yes, yes it was. Strider was thirty years old, thought to be in impeccable condition. But this was his third event in seven days, his second in twenty-four hours. The strain on his cardiovascular system . . . perhaps his heart was flawed. There would be an autopsy, of course. Probably not before morning. That's all the information we have at the moment . . .

The Europeans couldn't do much with it; the evening's last deadline had long passed in London, Paris, Frankfurt. The correspondents for the *Daily Mail,* for *L'Equipe,* for the *Zeitung* shrugged and sought the bus.

The East Coast sportswriters dashed for the rows of portable typewriters inside the press sub-center. Thirty minutes to make the city editions of *The Times, The Post, The Globe.* "Three-time Olympian T. J. Strider," they tapped, "who won two Olympic medals last week, collapsed and—"

No such urgency tugged at Sweeney. He was employed by the last afternoon daily east of Pittsburgh, a fine Baltimore relic called *The Nocturne* that had managed to survive the Six O'Clock News, crosstown traffic, and the demise of the padded armchair.

The newspaper had begun when Sweeney did, in the summer of 1922, and progressed leisurely—as he did—through the Jazz Age, the Depression, the Second War, and an assortment of regional upheavals. Breathlessness suited neither of them.

Sweeney at sixty-two was the last of the gentlemen sportswriters, gentleman and sportswriter generally being regarded as mutually exclusive. Nobody in his craft wore vested suits and watchchains any longer, but Sweeney did. Tweeds in the fall, flannels in the winter, linens in the summer, hats appropriate to the season. The functional gait, supplemented by a blackthorn stick, was somewhere between an amble and a stroll. If the afternoon newspaper did not

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exist, a succession of editors had grown fond of saying, it would have had to have been invented for Sweeney.

In a day when younger colleagues carried battery-powered computer keyboards with them on assignment, Sweeney still favored yellow legal pads and a fountain pen.

He wrote all dispatches longhand, in a script resembling Runic, and dictated them by telephone, inserting punctuation as needed.

It was a filing procedure that demanded generous deadlines, and Sweeney was accustomed to a dozen hours. The geographical realities of Los Angeles cost him three hours; still, there were nine left to Sweeney to stroll and poke about, to make a call or two and fiddle with the computer terminals the organizers had installed at every Olympic venue from Long Beach to Ojai.

Each of them was linked to a monster mainframe that hoarded millions of marginally applicable data-shreds. Every Szechuan restaurant in Westwood. The birthdates of the entire Bolivian modern pentathlon team. The semi-condensed history of the summer Games during the modern era. Memorable dates in the chronology of the city of Los Angeles and the state of California. The departure times of every Continental Airlines flight between here and Denver.

Sweeney had grave doubts about much of this business of inscribing the Library of Congress on a microchip. He viewed computers much as he viewed television—as a form of skywriting. Push a button and a vision appeared. Push another and it vanished. In the Fourteenth Century, they burned people who did such things at the stake. Now, Sweeney mused, they give them stock options.

The technology did have its uses, though, and Sweeney had always been a man of perspective. He'd given up the Pullman car for the Whisperjet, the dial phone for the touch-tone.

Now Sweeney wandered into the sub-center, where a hundred journalists from Santa Ana and Sao Paulo and St. Moritz sat pounding out their stories. He commandeered a terminal and brought it to life with an index finger. Up came the "menu," the complete list of available data.

Today's schedule, today's results, total results for every sport for two weeks. Names of every athlete, alphabetically and by country. Plane, train, and bus schedules in and out of Los Angeles. Emergency numbers. Biographical sketches on each competitor.

Sweeney punched 01 and got the biographical order form. On the line reading NAME OF ATHLETE, he typed STRIDER. In half a second a screenful of green letters and numbers shimmered.

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NAME: Strider, Thomas Jefferson. AGE: 30. HT.: 5-9. WT.: 150. COUNTRY: USA. HOMETOWN: Litchfield, Conn. COLLEGE: Yale. CLUB: Unattached.

The basics were followed by Strider's competitive history, his qualifying times, his performance in the Games.

Much of it Sweeney already knew. Strider had been at Montreal in 1976 as a Yale senior, the third American in the 10,000 meters. He'd reached the finals, pushed Finland's Lasse Viren for a while, then faded to eighth. He'd made the U.S. team again in 1980, the top man in three events, but Jimmy Carter had kept Strider and everyone else home from Moscow. A national security issue, Carter said.

Los Angeles was to be his farewell performance. Strider had run well in the US marathon trials at Buffalo, hanging in with Pete Pfitzinger and Salazar once the pack broke apart and had made the three-man team. Then he'd turned in personal bests in the track-and-field trials at the Coliseum a month later and qualified in both the 5000 and 10,000.

The death triple, they called it, the toughest parlay in the sport. Run the 10,000 on Monday. Come back Saturday for the 5000. Then again Sunday for the marathon, twenty-six miles through Santa Monica and Venice and Marina del Rey, then across the boulevards—La Cienega, La Brea, Crenshaw—to the Coliseum.

You could kill yourself trying the death triple, literally bust a gut, but it could be, had been, done. Zatopek had done it in 1952, winning all three. Viren had done it at Montreal and gone 1-1-5. No American had ever done it.

The computer told Strider's story. Silver in the 10,000 behind Cova of Italy. Bronze in the 5000. DNF in the marathon. Did Not Finish. "Understatement," Sweeney murmured.

He walked to the cluster of long-distance phones in the corner and pushed 1-203-555-1212. "New Haven," he said. "Yale University. Sterling Library." Sweeney scribbled 436-8335, then pushed them. "Reference, please . . . Yes. Could you put your hand on the yearbook for the undergraduate class of 1976?"

Five minutes passed. "Yes. Could you look up Thomas Strider and read me what it has under his name? Thank you."

Sweeney jotted notes on the back of a press release from a German shoe company listing its gold-medalists for the past fortnight. At the Olympic Games, champions did not belong to countries. They belonged to Adidas, to Nike, to Tiger.

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Born June 4, 1954 in New York City . . . Prepared at the Taft School . . . Lived in Davenport College . . . Major: Slavic Languages . . . Activities: Varsity Cross-Country, Varsity Track, Skull and Bones, Yale Russian Chorus . . . Future plans: Design school . . . "Cahn't thank you enough."

Now to the athletes' village, less than a mile away by blackthorn. The Americans were staying in a dormitory at USC. Odds were they'd be stuffing gear into zippered nylon bags by now, preparing for the morning flights out of LAX for a dozen points east.

With luck, Shackleford would be among them. He'd been an intermediate hurdler at Princeton when Strider was at Yale, had competed with and against him for ten years. Sweeney knew Shackleford from several forgotten Yale-Princeton-Harvard meets. The Big Three, they were called, but that was ancient history. Older than Sweeney.

Sweeney found Shackleford in the game room at the village, vaporizing a galactic cruiser. "MIS-tah Sweeney," he said, without glancing up.

"Old buddy, how ahh you?"

"More depressed than I was an hour ago."

"Strider." Sweeney winced. "I knew his father. I have a question for you about all that. This Russian business. Strider spoke it. Sang it. Went there."

Shackleford nodded. "And knew them. A lot of them."

"How?"

Shackleford, momentarily between cruisers, sighed. "Strider ran in Europe every summer for ten years," he said. "Oslo, Milan, Stockholm, Helsinki, Stuttgart—the whole circuit. He competed in every USA-USSR dual, went over for the Spartakiade in Moscow that year when they invited foreigners. You'd always see him hanging with their distance types. Moseyev, Fyedotkin, Antipov, those guys. Some people said he was working for the CIA. Informal stuff, nothing serious.

"The CIA has a thousand guys like that they can call upon. Professors from Caltech, immunologists, violinists, javelin throwers. Anyone who goes to Eastern Europe in an official capacity and who might come across something interesting. When they get back, they check in with someone at Langley. Not a formal debriefing. More like lunch."

"Seems logical," Sweeney conceded. "But why Strider?"

"He studied urban planning at Harvard Design School after Yale.

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Knew something about the infrastructure of major cities. He could tell you how the Moscow metro system functioned. How buildings were reinforced in Leningrad. Things of that nature."

Sweeney cocked an eyebrow. "Everything you might want to know if you were preparing for the Thermonuclear Games."

"Something like that. There was talk that Strider might go with them full-time after the Games. Langley's always had a soft spot for old boys who were Skull and Bones. They like the secret-society concept. Fee-fi-fo-fum and all that."

Sweeney put the notebook away. "Shack, old buddy, *always* good to see you. Sorry about the 400."

"What can I say?" Shackleford shrugged, blotting an entire imperial convoy from his video screen. "Edwin Moses is immortal."

Now, Sweeney guessed, to call a certain lab assistant up at UCLA. How does an Olympic medalist in perfect condition die in a footrace? Only his analytical chemist knows for sure.

From a pay phone downstairs, Sweeney rang 825-2635.

"Clinical pharmacology," a voice answered.

"Steadman, if you please," Sweeney said.

"She's fiddling with the gas chromatograph upstairs. I'll see if we can fetch her."

Steadman was a UCLA graduate student, twenty-two and brunette, and she'd been fiddling with the gas chromatograph twelve hours at a time for fourteen days, running through urine samples from a random succession of Italian fencers, German oarsmen, American weightlifters, and other sporting fauna.

The gas chromatograph, one of Silicon Valley's more complex toys, broke down the sample into molecules and spat forth a zigzag graph. If any of the molecules contained a banned drug, the chemists informed the International Olympic Committee, master of these quadrennial revels, and the committee went about the business of stripping medals, erasing records, suspending athletes, and other social pleasantries. Total time from delivery to detection: less than twenty-four hours.

Sweeney had met the gas chromatograph—and Steadman—a year earlier when he'd gone through on the lab tour they'd rigged up for the sporting press. He thought her brilliant and delightful. She thought him anachronistic and charming.

"Steadman here."

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"And Sweeney here, old girl. How's the gas-passing game been going for you?"

"Pretty slowly since the weightlifting's been done with. We found enough anabolics there to choke a herd of Guernseys. Not much this week, as you've probably heard. One Venezuelan boxer swallowed some cough syrup. A little nose spray here and there. And Strider."

"Strider? I thought he'd always been clean."

"He was on Monday, after the 10,000. Last night, though, we found strychnine. You didn't hear it here, but they were going to announce it in the morning. His 5000 is wiped from the books and the bronze goes to the Kenyan."

"Insane," Sweeney muttered. "Nobody's used strychnine since the Twenties."

"Somebody did yesterday," Steadman replied. "Your boy Strider. The gas chromatograph knows all. Dump a teaspoon of sugar in an Olympic-sized swimming pool and the GC will find it."

"In your debt," Sweeney said, ringing off. "As always."

What was this, Sweeney asked himself, 1896? Do-it-yourself doping out of your medicine cabinet? Why not just drink a bottle of Sloan's Liniment? Who was that American who'd staggered in to win the 1904 marathon at St. Louis? Hicks. He'd mixed strychnine and cognac and damn near killed himself.

Nobody did crude stimulants any more. There were more sophisticated methods available, like blood doping. A dose of strychnine might not hurt you in a 5000-meter race but it could kill you in a marathon, particularly if you ran both events a day apart. Why would Strider want to kill himself doing a death triple?

Precisely, Sweeney realized. Strider wouldn't, but somebody else might.

A competitor? It didn't figure. Strider had never broken 2:11:40 in any marathon; he didn't shape up as a medalist here.

Who, then? The KGB, worried about the Langley connection? But how could they get to Strider? An Olympic village was only slightly less secure than a SAC base.

The Los Angeles organizers had signed on nearly two security people for every athlete. They had state-of-the-art communications and sensing equipment. A coded photo-ID system. Fences everywhere. And a former FBI agent running the show.

Plus, Strider had never been one to go off on his own at the Games. Sweeney remembered that from Montreal. The village had whatever he needed—movies, banking facilities, twenty-four-hour cafeteria,

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duty-free shops, and the French women's 4x100 relay team, which Strider had taken on as a project in serial seduction. Monique, Francoise, Jeanne, and Sylvie in that order, leadoff to anchor. Qualifying time: 43.60 seconds.

Strider left the village only to go to one of the practice tracks or to the Coliseum, boarding a guarded bus each way. If the KGB wanted him dead, they had to come to Strider and that meant getting inside the gates. And the only people with that privilege were the "Olympic family"—officials, coaches, athletes, trainers, logistical staff, the press.

Back upstairs, Sweeney sought the man from Princeton. He found him engrossed in the Robby Roto machines, surrounded by an admiring throng of Austrians. "Talk to you, old buddy? Away from these mittel-Europeans?"

Shackleford grinned. "I guess Robby Roto can chew his way through this mineshaft on his own."

"You didn't see Strider yesterday morning, did you? Before the 5000?"

"Sure did. We had breakfast together in the cafeteria. Or at least we were there at the same time. I had the 4x400 relay final to deal with, so we were both on the same schedule. Got up about eight, ate around ten. Whole-grain toast. Fruit. Juice. An egg or two. Loosen up for an hour or so, nap for a while, bus to the Coliseum. The usual race-day ritual."

"See him with anybody?"

"A couple of West German milers. And that Russian field-events judge—you know, the one who's been at every Games since Helsinki. Florid-face, square-jaw, pomade-hair. Smokes those cigarettes with cardboard filters. Your basic Cyrillic stereotype. Strider's known him for years."

"What's his name?"

"Vladimir. Vladislav. Valeri. Vanya. I don't know. Every Russian first name since Chekhov begins with a V."

"Obligated," Sweeney concluded. "As always."

I suppose all I need to know now, Sweeney thought, the computer can tell me. He walked through Exposition Park just a trifle more briskly than before, displayed his photo-ID for the guard at the Coliseum gate, and made for the sub-center and a terminal.

He called up the menu, punched 17, and got the list of judges and referees, broken down by sport.

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He pushed 01 and track-and-field appeared. Two-thirds of the way down, Sweeney noticed PETROV, VASILY I. (URS) and it came together for him. Petrov had judged the shot put the day before. There were no other Russians on the screen. Has to be, Sweeney thought.

Back to the menu. Punch 12 for the transportation schedules, 03 for the airlines. Sweeney scrolled the listings until he came to Los Angeles-Tokyo.

One flight tonight, JAL. Several more tomorrow. The menu again. Punch 16 for frequently used numbers, then 02 for airlines.

"If you please, I'm supposed to be traveling to Tokyo tonight with a Mr. Petrov, first initial V," Sweeney said, "but I'm not sure of the carrier and flight. Could you assist me? . . . Flight 62, that's fine. Awfully good of you."

Once more to the menu, Sweeney told himself, and be done with it. Punch 13 for emergency numbers. The FBI was 272-6161.

"This is Sweeney with *The Baltimore Nocturne*. You may want to stop and search a Vasily Petrov on JAL 62. Leaves at eleven tonight. I believe he may have something to do with the death of that American marathoner, Strider. If you need me further, I'm at the Biltmore downtown. As always."

Sweeney yawned and glanced around the sub-center. Half past ten and nobody here but the man from the *San Diego Union*. You could come in at any given hour and see the man from the *San Diego Union* at his place, transcribing tapes, the rewind button worn to a nub. Sweeney consulted his pocket watch. Barely seven hours until deadline. He drew up a chair, fished in a vest pocket for the fountain pen, and began composing the definitive account. William Bolitho Ryall, Sweeney thought, we're arm in arm, you and I.

The Times and the phonecall from Special Agent Egan arrived simultaneously in the morning. *The Times* had Petrov nicely manacled on Page 1, the bushy eyebrows arched in surprise, a federal employee at each elbow. They'd found a dossier on Strider in his shoulderbag, an empty drug vial in his room back at the village, and start lists for each event in the death triple.

"Nice piece of work, Mister Sweeney," Egan began.

"No bother," Sweeney demurred. "Late deadline, you know. Wasn't pressed for time."

"How did you figure Petrov, though?"

"All the usual elements. Motive. Opportunity. Method. Somebody wanted Strider dead and wanted to make it look as though he'd done

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it himself. But Strider seemed like an intelligent sort, what with the New Haven background. Yale men don't usually run around doing themselves in. It's unseemly. Not to mention unproductive."

"Why here?"

"Last good chance," Sweeney said. "Strider was going to quit running after the Games and they couldn't be sure what Langley would do with him. The CIA can make you reasonably inaccessible if they care to. Besides, the Soviets' boycott stood to work to their own advantage."

"How so?"

"Once the Eastern bloc pulled out, most people assumed there'd be no problems with security. Oh, there were as many uniformed types walking around with holstered weapons, but the tension level was scaled back considerably. It was easy to forget that there were Russians here, but there were. They still sent their judges and officials, because the Soviets wanted to hold their ground politically in the sporting federations. And of course they had access to most areas that are restricted to the public."

"So how do you narrow it to Petrov? And Strider?"

"Strider knew more than they thought healthy about their urban infrastructure. And Petrov knew Strider. Knew his breakfast ritual, and knew that Strider would have his guard down around him. Somewhere along the line, I gather, Petrov dosed him. Not all the Soviet judges are judges. A healthy number double for the KGB. They keep an eye on their own athletes, in case they have any defection fantasies. And they're available for a bit of counter-espionage, too."

"But why JAL? The Russians have all their people housed aboard their luxury liner in the harbor off Long Beach. Petrov could have left with them on their Aeroflot charter today."

"Too much could have happened overnight. They would have found the strychnine during the autopsy. And somebody could have made the same deduction I did."

Egan smiled. "As I said, a nice piece of work."

"Composition without reportage falls short of journalism," Sweeney said. "Mencken told me."

"Q"

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EQMM AUTHOR PHOTO QUIZ

Part 1

Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine is not an illustrated magazine, it is a solid fiction magazine. That was the original intention behind it and that is how its readers continue to want it. However, to celebrate issues #499 (this one) and #500 (January), we have devised a two-part photo quiz featuring *EQMM*'s regular contributors that we hope you'll enjoy.

There are no prizes—indeed no ratings for correct answers. Steady readers of the magazine will find it easy beyond belief. New readers may find it boring beyond belief and wish the space had been given over to stories instead. But if you feel that way, bless you, hang in there, and save these two issues because chances are that you'll eventually feel so close to these authors you will want to know what these satisfiers of your pleasure look like.

The answers and photo credits are on pages 63 and 64.

The Editors

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1. His first published fiction, in the May 1948 issue of *EQMM*, has been rated the most memorable mystery short story of all time.

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2. Author #1, himself several times winner of the same award, presenting the Mystery Writers of America Edgar for best short story of the year to the author of "Chance After Chance" (11/77 *EQMM*).

3. Author #1 with his wife at a luncheon in his honor at Bouchercon VIII, being greeted by author #5.

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4. Author of *Fahrenheit 451*, he has just published his first mystery novel.

5. Creator of four volumes of short stories about the Black Widowers, he has a science-fiction magazine of his own.

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6. Lawyers themselves, these writers have created legal sleuths Scott Jordan . . .
7. Jonas Pickett . . .

8. Horace Rumpole . . .

9. Loren Mensing.

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10. Think Henry and Emmy Tibbett. (Additional clue: She is a cat lover.)

11. Think Selena and Hugh Mead of Section Q.

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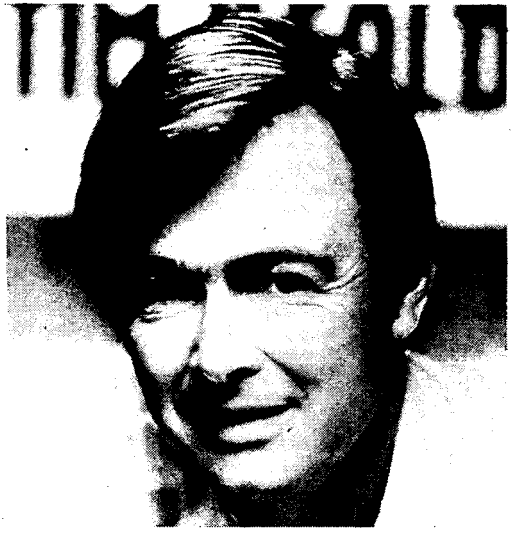
12. Creator of Charles Paris, he was president of the Oxford University Dramatic Society.



13. A colleague of author #12 at Qxford, his non-fiction book, *Old Boy Networks,* was published earlier this year.

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14. There has been a story by this writer in every issue of *EQMM* for over eleven years.

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15. Author #14 with his wife.

16. Wife and editor discussing author #14 on an escalator in Toronto.

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17. Her stories delve deeply into the female psyche and won high praise from Agatha Christie.
18. Like author #17 an original and a wordsmith, he writes uniquely about alcoholics, teenagers, cab drivers, dreams.

19. Think (left to right) Inspector Cockrill, Matt Erridge, and Julie Hayes.

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20. They write of the past, about Dr. Sam: Johnson, Detector . . .
21. A. J. Raffles, amateur cracksman . . .

22. Uncle Abner, Virginia squire . . .
23. Brother Cadfael, twelfth-century Benedictine monk.

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24. Two faithful and reliable contributors to *EQMM*, think baseball, Baytown, and music . . .
25. He is a full-time journalist for a major London newspaper.

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26. They won Edgars for best short story for their first published stories (in *EQMM*'s Department of Firsts) for "The Purple Shroud" . . .

27. and "The Cloud Beneath the Eaves."

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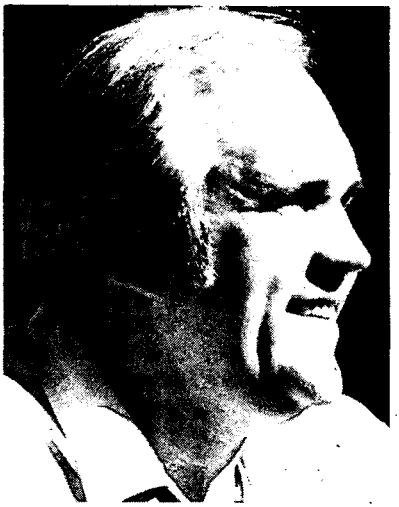

28. All residents of California, their series characters include Dan Kearny . . .
29. Dave Brandstetter . . .

30. Sam Train . . .

31. and Ed Gorgon.

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32. Two MWA Grand Masters, the Belgian writer who created Inspector Jules Maigret . . .

33. and the American who created Pierre Chambrun and John Jericho, among others.

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ANSWERS TO EQMM AUTHOR PHOTO QUIZ Part 1

1. Stanley Ellin. The story is "Specialty of the House."
2. Thomas Walsh with Stanley Ellin. Photograph by Hollander Photographic.
3. Stanley and Jeanne Ellin with Isaac Asimov. Photograph by Hollander Photographic.
4. Ray Bradbury.
5. Isaac Asimov.
6. Harold Q. Masur.
7. Michael Gilbert.
8. John Mortimer. Photograph by *Daily Telegraph* (London).
9. Francis M. Nevins, Jr. Photograph by Albert Raccah.
10. Patricia Moyes. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
11. Patricia McGerr. Photograph © Akira Hagiwara.
12. Simon Brett. Photograph by Jeremy Saywell.
13. Tim Heald. Photograph by *Networks*.
14. Edward D. Hoch. Photograph by Patricia M. Hoch.
15. Edward D. and Patricia M. Hoch. Photograph by Eleanor Sullivan.
16. Patricia M. Hoch and Eleanor Sullivan. Photograph by Edward D. Hoch.
17. Florence V. Mayberry. Photograph by Lacey Crawford.
18. Robert Twohy. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
19. Christianna Brand, Aaron Marc Stein, and Dorothy Salisbury Davis. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
20. Lillian de la Torre. Photograph by Annabel de la Torre Bueno.

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21. Barry Perowne. The creator of A. J. Raffles was, of course, E. W. Hornung (1866–1921).
22. John F. Suter. Uncle Abner's creator was Melville Davisson Post (1869–1930). Photograph by Charleston (WV) *Daily Mail*.
23. Ellis Peters. Photograph by W. Haddock.
24. William Bankier. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
25. Jeffry Scott.
26. Joyce Harrington.
27. Barbara Owens. Photograph by Douglas Weiman.
28. Joe Gores. Photograph by Earl Nisbet.
29. Joseph Hansen.
30. Ernest Savage.
31. Jon L. Breen. Photograph © Ken M. Sekiguchi.
32. Georges Simenon.
33. Hugh Pentecost. Photograph by J. William Johnson.

Photo layout by Theresa Parisi.

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a *NEW* short story by

JEFFRY SCOTT

"Come on," Colin's American child-bride said, "let's live in a genuine village."

We love Jeffry Scott's turn of mind—and the way he keeps turning out stories that are so highly readable, whether light, like this one, or pitch dark, like "The Fear," in the November 1983 issue . . .

A HELPING HAND

by JEFFRY SCOTT

Diana always knows best. Calling my child-bride headstrong is like terming the Titanic an unlucky ship—accurate in its way, but missing the full flavor somehow.

England didn't quite match her expectations, founded on late-late movies ("This damned fog! But tell me, Inspector, what *else* warned you that Colonel Fanshawe was a werewolf?") and the kind of Christmas card that's strong on Dickensian streets packed with plump and rosy extroverts.

"If we lived in a village," she suggested with ill-founded certainty, "I'd soon be part of a community. Okay, I'll always be American, but I want to be a true Brit as well."

So I explained about villages, having grown up in one. My twenty-first birthday party at the church hall had involved pretty well everyone, and the chairman of the parish council—our rural Capo—beamed at me as he lifted a glass of champagne and confided, "Well, you're a good lad and we like to make outsiders feel welcome, Colin." I'd been born exactly fourteen and a half miles away.

"Candyfloss," snapped Diana, though she was usually a bit more direct than that. "Come on, let's live in a genuine village."

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Actually, it worked out rather well. Diana's not just stubborn. She's pretty, kind, energetic, chatty. Within six months she knew everyone—and more to the point, they knew her.

I suppose her greatest triumph was Cyril Norley—Nervy Norley, Steeple Oaks branded him when being polite.

Mr. Norley, as sociologists put it in their impenetrable jargon, was bad news, a right packet of trouble. A complainer with a persecution complex, obsessively tidy, with a bottomless fund of unwanted advice.

"Oh, he's not so bad," said Diana, though even she blushed, not believing it. "He just needs getting used to."

"I'd rather not," I admitted. Nervy Norley, with his pallid, chewy grin, was a terrible neighbor. Just behind our house is a row of identical Victorian cottages, built for workmen but now far too expensive for anyone but the sort of toiler whose sweat falls on an executive desk's blotter.

I met him when he came to complain about the bonfire. Didn't I know that local bylaws forbade them before sundown? Didn't I have any consideration?

Yes and no, I replied. Yes, I knew about the bonfire rule, and no, I *didn't* have any consideration. Because it wasn't a bonfire. Diana had been burning old paint off the window frames and, exactly as I had prophesied and she had doubted, ended up making a spirited attempt to reduce our week-old ancestral home to a pile of period ashes.

At that moment the Fire Brigade came belting along, so even Cyril Norley had to take the point. Not that he was embarrassed. "I still think it's very inconsiderate," he whined. "It'll take me weeks to get the stench of smoke out of my curtains."

A real sweetheart.

But Diana worked on the old—gentleman.

"He's eating out of my hand," she boasted a few weeks later.

"Mind you don't get rabies," I suggested sourly.

"Stay out of it, honey. As a goodwill ambassador, you stink."

Thus began the great house-sitting saga. Nervy Norley decided to inflict himself on an aunt at Harrogate for a few days' summer vacation. There'd been a rash of burglaries in and around Steeple Oaks—nothing sinister, there's a rash of burglaries *everywhere* in Britain (we try to keep up with the developed countries)—and he'd

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decided to cancel his trip until Diana volunteered to keep an eye on his home.

He told me all about it at the station. "I may say, Mr. Briggs, that your good lady is one of the few, the *very* few people whom I would be prepared to entrust such a responsibility."

He really was a poisonous character, managing to inflict a double insult with the unspoken postscript, *"Even if she is just an American,"* with a similar silent PPS: *"And I'd certainly never let a lout like you across my threshold—"*

"You must be crazy," I told her on getting home that evening. "A passing bird has only to disgrace itself on Norley's greenhouse roof while you're in charge, and he'll sue."

"Stop being so negative. If Norley trusts me, it means I've arrived."

Something else arrived on Saturday morning: a plump envelope containing a doorkey and what looked like the logistical breakdown for a moon shot. Diana smiled bravely after scanning it. "Just a few tips from Cyril," she explained.

I glanced at the first of several sheets. "Plant 1, in green bowl on brass tray in hall (do not confuse this with identical plant in *blue* bowl on similar tray, same table). Leaves to be *sprayed,* not—repeat not—watered, within next 36 hours."

"Enjoy," I chuckled.

But she didn't. Diana came hurrying in while I was squeezing the coffee pot for a third cup. "The idiot! He's left me the wrong key, I can't get in!"

I went back with her, and she was right. The key fit, but it didn't turn.

The little cottage was much like Cyril Norley—tall, narrow, firmly shut up. Through the tiny-paned windows one could see a few of his precious plants. "Well, he'll be back in four days," I consoled her. "They may get a bit thirsty, but I doubt they'll actually turn their roots up and go to the great florist shop in the sky."

It was then that I spotted the cat. A pleasant, marmalade-colored joker, peacefully asleep on a windowsill. What made me swear was that the moggy was *inside,* locked in.

"We'll have to break in, then explain to the police," said Diana. "I'll phone them right now—you start breaking in."

"Hold very hard. Norley needs kicking, for messing up the keys and forgetting to mention his cat. He probably thought you might

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not want to take that on as well—some people loathe cats—but if we start breaking windows, he can have apoplexy and sue us."

"It's a matter of life or death," she argued.

"Ours maybe. The man is fanatical about his blasted cottage." Then I had an idea. The living room opened onto a little entry, more closet than hall, just the other side of the front door. And the living-room door, I saw by looking through the letterbox, was ajar.

Half an hour later, we'd worked half a can of catfood through the letterbox with an old pudding spoon. Liquid was a tougher challenge, until Diana thought of trickling condensed milk through one of her icing funnels. The lobby was floored with quarry tiles that could be wiped clean easily enough when Norley got back from vacation.

I tapped the window, making the ginger cat start. Then I called, "Kitty, kitty!" through the letter slot. A sagacious, not to say greedy beast, it was noshing away before my spine began aching very badly.

"Yankee ingenuity," my child-bride commented smugly, on the strength of the condensed milk. Since the rest of the ploy had been my idea, that seemed a bit rich.

Sunday, we slept late and it was lunchtime before we returned to Chateau Norley. The cat was pacing the windowsill like a short-tempered windjammer skipper prowling his quarterdeck before decreeing a spot of keelhauling.

"Gosh, he's licked up every morsel! The floor's spotless!" Diana reported, one eye to the letterbox. "Better give him a whole can this time, Colin. I'll fetch more milk."

On Monday morning, an extremely pretty girl—another of the neighbors—gave me an odd look while I was waiting for the train. Her name was Eleanor Morgan and she worked for a bank. I smiled at her encouragingly, trying not to make it a leer, and she couldn't decide whether to nod or shrug, ending up in a confused blend of the two and a hurried retreat to the waiting room. Odd.

On Monday evening, Diana was waiting at the station. "Trouble," she greeted me breathlessly. "Colin, I've been keeping watch on Norley's place all day. I went there after you left, to check on the cat. *Things have been moved around.*"

"How d'you mean?"

She gestured impatiently. "Oh, the TV's not in the same place and I think some of the ornaments are missing—it's hard to tell through

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those pokey little windows. It's burglars. They've found out Norley's away, they don't realize we're around, and they're taking their time ransacking the place."

"Rubbish! It's not Buckingham Palace! Any self-respecting, diligent burglar could strip Norley's rabbit-hutch in about half an hour—and that includes carpets and drapes."

But after she dragged me over—the ginger cat mewed hopefully, pawing the window, but Diana assured me he'd been well fed—I had to agree that somebody had been messing about in there.

The police, once we'd managed to catch PC Aldergrove at home, took even less persuading. Jack Aldergrove was on the phone to County HQ before we'd finished telling the tale, and within an hour the Special Burglary Squad had set an ambush.

Neither Diana nor I are inquisitive people, it goes without saying. It just happened that we could see the row of cottages from our house. After a while, I got used to standing on the toilet seat with my head out of the window, where my child-bride insisted on perching too, arm round my waist.

"Better than cop shows," she murmured.

"It *is* a cop show," I grumbled. I had a cramp in my left leg and my right foot was wet, from slipping in at one stage. PC Aldergrove had lectured us about not hanging around to witness the arrest. However, he couldn't stop us peeking from our own property.

And after all that, we missed it.

Jack Aldergrove coughed commandingly, just behind us, making me slip in again. "Sorry, but your front door was open and I couldn't make you hear," he said. He didn't sound very sorry and the uniformed inspector at his back didn't look it, either.

He looked mad enough to spit nails, actually.

Jack had one of those maddening I-won't-even-*ask*-why-the-two-of-you-are-standing-there expressions.

Going red, helping Diana step down, I asked, "Did you catch them?"

"No," said the inspector. Only he shouted it. I discovered later that his name was Blunt, and my goodness, it fitted. "No, Mr. Briggs, but we did waste a great deal of time and made fools of ourselves, detaining a Miss Eleanor Morgan when she entered the property in question."

Luckily, in hindsight, Jack Aldergrove and I are in the same pub darts team. Therefore, he knew I wasn't insane. A terrible hand at

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getting double-20 to win a crucial game, maybe, but not a revolving-eyed loony.

He spoke reproachfully. "Practical jokes are all very well, Colin, but sucking us in, that's serious."

"Joke?" Diana rapped.

"Pouring condensed milk through Miss Morgan's letterbox? That's vandalism, Mrs. Briggs. Childish, too."

It isn't only when drowning that your past life flashes before you. Events of the past few days whirled through my head and I stared at Diana. She smiled sheepishly and said in a very small voice, "I *thought* it was Norley's house, Col—I swear I did. I'd never been there, just chatted over the gate. Those row cottages look so much alike."

So we explained the whole thing, Inspector Blunt's snorts and sighs messaging "A likely tale" every time we paused for breath, but finally they accepted our excuse. Two adults caught standing on a toilet seat with their heads thrust out of a window can be expected to get an occasional address wrong.

"But why didn't Eleanor Morgan *tell* us?" Diana cried. "You say other neighbors told her we were doing it—they saw us in the garden with the catfood."

Jack Aldergrove shook his head sadly. "Well, it was a bit delicate, Mrs. Briggs. Not to put too fine a point on it, Miss Morgan's got hold of the idea that the pair of you are—ahem!—eccentric. A bit fey, one might put it."

"Bloody nutters, more like," Inspector Blunt translated bitterly and not as far under his breath as he imagined.

"She nearly tackled you at the station this morning, she told me, but her nerve failed," Jack informed me. I'd never thought of him as a sadist before, just a much better darts player and our local PC.

But he was a fair man, and shared it out. Having wound me up, he turned to Diana and said innocently, "Miss Morgan thought it might be one of your American customs, Mrs. Briggs. Don't you all dress up in funny costumes and do strange things to other peoples' houses once a year?"

"That's trick or treat! Nothing to do with anything!"

"Tricks is the word," said Inspector Blunt. "And it was no treat. Good night to you."

It was the sort of situation that makes you grind your teeth and

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groan aloud even years afterward. I wouldn't have minded it being years afterward, either. We stared at each other.

Diana said: "We should go straight round to Eleanor Morgan and go through the whole thing again. We *should.*"

"*You* should. It was your project from start to finish, light of my life. I'm no male chauvinist. Credit where it's due, and all that. I modestly cheat left and leave the full spotlight to you."

She nodded abstractedly. "You're all heart, Colin. We could move, I guess. How does the Andaman Islands sound—that old French penal colony? Far enough away from the neighbors? I don't understand it. I've worked my butt off to gain a solid place in a real country, British-as-roast-beef community and, bingo, I'm the crazy American lady."

I was almost asleep, hours later, when she started shaking with laughter. We have a weird sense of humor, my child-bride and I. Because I knew right away what was tickling her.

"Yes," I said against her shoulder, "it couldn't possibly be worse. I love you dearly, all the same. *Especially* the same."

Except—we were wrong and it could be worse.

Cyril Norley got us out of bed at midnight. He'd come down on the last train. He was distraught, quivering with rage and frustration.

"My plants! My lovely plants are a mass of brown tips!" he gibbered. And almost as an afterthought, "Not only that, but I've been burgled!"

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a *NEW* Libby Knowles story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

This is the second story in Edward D. Hoch's new series about ex-policewoman Libby Knowles, now in business for herself as a bodyguard. The first story in the series appeared in the Ellery Queen anthology, Prime Crimes, *published late last year.*

Frederick Warfer was an industrial consultant—an inventor of sorts. "Someone's been getting into my house at night," he told Libby. "It sets off the alarms, but by the time the police arrive no one's there. There's never any sign of forced entry . . ."

THE INVISIBLE INTRUDER

by EDWARD D. HOCH

Clients of the Libby Knowles Protection Service sometimes proved to be a bit paranoid, and at first Libby would have placed Frederick Warfer in that category. He was a balding man of around fifty who glanced over his shoulder even as he entered her outer office.

Libby's new secretary, Janice, was out to lunch at the time, and when he saw Libby at the reception-desk, he jumped to the wrong conclusion. "I—I don't have an appointment. Do you suppose Miss Knowles could see me?"

Libby straightened up. "I'm Libby Knowles. My secretary is at lunch."

"Maybe I should come back later," he muttered. "I didn't realize it was lunchtime."

"No, come in. I've already had some yogurt."

He followed her into the inner office, a big square room with a wide window overlooking the busy traffic on Madison Street. The

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building was old, but the rent was reasonable, and that was what mattered to Libby in her first year of being in business on her own.

"Now what can I do for you, Mr.—?" She glanced at the card he'd handed her. "Warfer."

"Frederick Warfer. I'm an industrial consultant—an inventor of sorts. Companies come to me with technical problems and I try to find solutions for them."

"You want me to protect an invention of yours?"

"No, I want you to protect *me*. Someone's trying to kill me."

"Why do you think that?" Libby asked, sitting down behind her desk and indicating that he sit, too.

"Someone's been getting into my house at night," he said, perching on the one visitor's chair. "It sets off the alarms, but by the time the police arrive no one's there. There's never any sign of forced entry."

"Perhaps the alarm system's defective," Libby suggested.

"I've checked it completely and it's working perfectly." He hesitated. "I want you to come out and stay at the house with me."

"All right. That's my job, of course. But I don't share a room with male clients. Do you have a spare room?"

"Yes."

"Are you married, Mr. Warfer?" She'd started making notes on a yellow legal pad.

"I—no, not at present. My wife left me two years ago."

"I see. Are you alone in the house? Do you have any children?"

"No, no children. I'm alone. My address is on my card there."

Libby studied it, then asked, "Who do you think might want to kill you?"

"A business competitor, maybe. I don't know. I just need protection. The police don't believe me any more. After a full week of that alarm going off, they're starting to think I'm doing it myself."

"Are you, Mr. Warfer?"

"No, of course not! But I'm afraid the police are going to stop coming out when the alarm goes off. Or else they'll take their time about it. And that's when he'll do it."

"He'll?"

"She'll! Whoever!"

"Do what?"

"Kill me."

"I see. All right, Mr. Warfer, I'll be there this evening."

"Will you be armed?"

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"Yes. I'm a former policewoman. I know how to use a handgun responsibly."

Libby had arranged to meet Sergeant O'Bannion for a drink late that afternoon. He was a bulky man with a big face that seemed to crease itself into a gloomy expression at the least opportunity. People who didn't know him well thought he was perpetually unhappy, but Libby knew better. O'Bannion had been the one person who'd urged her to remain on the force after her lover, a vice-squad detective, had been caught in a cocaine scandal and killed himself in an auto crash while fleeing his fellow cops. She hadn't followed O'Bannion's advice, but he'd been good to her—and good for her—ever since, often sending business her way that the department couldn't handle on an official basis.

"I have a new client," she told him over drinks. "A man named Frederick Warfer. Do you know him?"

O'Bannion shook his head. "Should I?"

"His alarm's been ringing every night for a week. He's afraid the police will start ignoring him."

"I'll check the reports in the morning. Where does he live?"

"Maple Shade Drive. I'll be out there tonight."

"Take care of yourself, Libby. Lady bodyguards are hard to replace."

She smiled. "The biggest threat to my health so far has been starvation."

Warfer's home proved to be an expensive Moorish-looking place with a long curving driveway. Libby guessed it had probably been built back in the 1930s when the popularity of Moorish architecture had reached this part of the country. She'd expected to find her client alone in a darkened house, but the window showed plenty of light and he opened the door with an attractive blonde woman at his side.

"Come in, Miss Knowles. This is Helen Rodney, my neighbor from across the street."

Helen Rodney appeared to be in her late thirties, with the sort of eyes that stayed hard even when she smiled. "This is your bodyguard?" she asked him with a laugh. "What will she protect you from?"

"I'd like to have a look around the house," Libby told Warfer.

The June night had been warm and she'd worn only a light jacket over her blouse and slacks. She dropped it on top of her overnight

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bag in the entryway and followed after her client, turning her back decisively on the blonde neighbor. They stepped down into a large living room, dominated on its far end by a massive fieldstone fireplace. "That's lovely," Libby said, going and peering into it.

"I never use it. It's too much trouble."

"It's almost big enough for a man to hide in," Libby said, peering up into the chimney.

Warfer shook his head. "Not really. I checked it out."

The dining room was almost as large, with a table and ten chairs, and the kitchen was spacious and lavishly equipped. It was a house obviously designed for entertaining and Libby said as much.

"We did a great deal of entertaining before my wife left," Warfer said quietly.

He showed her the highly sophisticated burglar-alarm system that not only wired the doors and windows but also threw a pattern of invisible beams across rooms and doorways. "Once it's switched on, any movement in here, no matter how slight, triggers the alarm," he explained.

"I've seen only one alarm system this elaborate in my life," Libby told him, "and that was in a museum. What do you have here that's so valuable, anyway?"

"I told you, I'm an inventor. There are times when a small fortune in ideas, notes, and mock-ups can be found in this house."

Helen Rodney had followed along a few steps behind them, but when Warfer led Libby to the stairs to the second floor she said, "I think I'd better be going. If you get frightened of anything during the night, Frederick, just give me a call."

When she'd gone, Libby remarked, "I feel as if I'm coming between you two."

"No. Helen's just an old friend. A friend of my wife's, really. She's been trying to take care of me ever since Betty left."

"Your wife?"

He nodded, leading her into the master bedroom and indicating a framed color photograph on a bedside table. "Betty and I were married for twenty-one years. And then she just left."

"I'm sorry." The woman was smiling at the camera, but the picture was overexposed and she was squinting slightly into the sun. Her eyes were a stunning blue. The photo had obviously been blown up from a much smaller candid shot. "She's very attractive."

"She was."

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When he added no more, she said, "Tell me about this intruder. What time does he usually arrive?"

"Shortly after I retire. Sometimes I'm still awake when the alarm goes off. See—" he showed her the mechanism "—it buzzes next to the bed, too."

"Midnight? One o'clock?"

"It varies. Closer to one, usually, but that may be because I go to bed late. The police have come and searched every inch of the house, but they've found no one. The intruder is invisible by night and non-existent by day. But I have a terrible feeling he's getting closer to me every time."

"We'll see what happens tonight," Libby said.

Warfer showed her the guest room and she brought her bag up and unpacked what she needed. The .38-caliber snub-nosed revolver went under her pillow.

Warfer rapped at her door a few minutes after one, waking her. "The alarm just went off!" he told her anxiously.

Libby, who slept fully clothed when on a job, grabbed her gun from under the pillow and ran down the stairs ahead of him. Her left hand hit the living-room light switch as she went into a crouch in the doorway. "Hands up!" she shouted. "I have a gun!"

The room was empty, and so was the dining room. The entire first floor was empty.

"You can see for yourself that the doors and windows haven't been tampered with," Warfer said after they had both checked them. "It's just like the other times."

"Maybe you've got mice."

"Mice four feet tall? That's the height of these alarm beams that were broken."

A flashing red light suddenly lit up the wall opposite the front windows. "That'll be the police," Libby said. "I'll go out and talk to them."

There was a single officer in the squad car, a slim young man whose name tag read David Oakes. He was new since Libby's days on the force and she introduced herself.

"I know," the officer said wearily. "The alarm went off again and no one was here." His deep-set brown eyes took in the scene.

"Well, I was here this time, but I didn't set it off."

Oakes sighed and recorded the time on his call sheet. "They're

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talking about fining people with defective alarm systems. It wastes one hell of a lot of our time."

"He claims it's not defective. He's an inventor and he's checked all the wiring."

Frederick Warfer joined them. "I'm sorry, Officer. I had hoped that hiring Miss Knowles might solve the problem."

"Give me a chance," Libby countered. "It's only my first night."

A light went on in the house across the street and she saw Helen Rodney appear in the doorway. "Are you all right, Frederick?" she called.

"I'm fine, Helen," he called back. "Just another false alarm."

She wrapped her robe more tightly around her, waved, and went back inside.

"You'd better disconnect the alarm for tonight," Oakes suggested after taking a quick walk around the house, shining his flashlight at the windows and trying the doors.

"All right," Warfer told him. "I'll disconnect the call-in alarm that flashes at the police station, but I'll leave on the house alarm."

"Fine," Libby agreed.

Somehow she didn't think their unseen visitor would be back that night, and she was right. They spent the rest of the time till dawn in undisturbed slumber.

Since the bodyguard assignment was only for nighttime, Libby left Warfer's house and drove to her office in the morning as usual. She was going through the mail, dictating some replies to her secretary, when Sergeant O'Bannion phoned. "How'd it go last night, Libby?"

"The alarm went off but there was no one in the house. The same as before."

"I dug out the complaint file and checked on this guy Warfer. He's had a string of false alarms lately."

"I know. That's why he hired me."

"But there's more. Somebody flagged his file with a cross-index to Missing Persons."

"How come?"

"He had a wife named Monica Warfer."

"He told me she walked out on him." But he'd called her Betty.

"Maybe it's true. It was eleven years ago and she just disappeared one day. He said she went downtown to shop and never came back. We never found a trace of her. Some of the smart guys in the Bureau

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thought maybe he buried her in the back yard, but there was never any evidence of it."

"How old would she have been at the time?" Libby asked him. Warfer had told her Betty left him just two years ago.

"Somewhat younger than her husband. Only thirty-five. A good age for running off, I suppose."

"Any relatives?"

"A brother who still lives in town. Ralph Forrest. Want his address?"

"I think so, yes."

After lunch she tracked down Ralph Forrest at work. He was a used-car salesman at a lot near downtown. When she told him what she wanted, his manner turned into something resembling annoyance. "Monica's gone," he said. "She's been gone for eleven years. Why are you bothering me now?"

"You must have heard from her during that time—a postcard or something."

He shook his head. "We weren't very close toward the end."

"The end of what?"

"I mean before she went away. I'd be the last one she'd write to."

"Who'd be the first one?"

"Her husband, I suppose."

"Are you friendly with Frederick Warfer?"

"Not so's you'd notice. He came raving to me a few times after she left, but I haven't seen him in years."

"You think she ran away from him?"

"You met Warfer? What do you think? Me, I always thought she was crazy to marry him in the first place. Anything might have happened."

"He believes someone has been breaking into his house, trying to harm him."

"Who'd bother?"

"You don't think your sister could be back in the city, do you?"

The very idea seemed to startle him. He thought about it, but only for a moment. "No, she's not back. She's never coming back."

"Would you happen to have a picture of your sister?"

"I might have an old snapshot in my desk. Let me see."

Libby followed him into an office at the center of the lot. He rummaged through the drawers of a cluttered desk before coming up with a photograph of a solemn woman in her thirties with dark

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hair and eyes. It wasn't the same woman as the one in the photograph by Frederick Warfer's bed.

"Was your sister ever called Betty?"

"Betty? No—her name was Monica." He seemed about to say more, but Libby was in a hurry now.

"May I keep this picture for a bit?"

"Take it," he told her tiredly. "I don't need it."

Libby arrived promptly at eight o'clock to begin another night of guard duty. This time Warfer was alone and there was no sign of his neighbor from across the street.

"I'm going to sleep down here in the living room tonight," she told him.

His eyes widened a bit but he said nothing to dissuade her. Once more she searched the ground floor of the house and made certain the doors and windows were locked. It was a warm night, but she didn't want to risk opening a window. "Don't you have air-conditioning?" she asked.

"It's bad for your health," he said with conviction. "I leave the windows open upstairs. Do you want to change your mind and—"

Libby shook her head. "I'm more likely to hear someone trying to break in if I'm down here," she told him.

After he went up to bed, Libby read a little, then, before she turned out the lights, she switched on the alarm system so that a small red light would go on in the house but no signal would be transmitted to the police. It just might be that the arrival of the squad car was scaring away the invisible intruder.

Taking care to keep below the four-foot height of the electronic beams that criss-crossed the first floor, she settled down with a blanket, a flashlight and her revolver close at hand on the coffee table. She could hear Warfer moving around upstairs for a time and then there was silence. It was about midnight.

For the next half hour, nothing happened.

Remembering how quickly the alarm had sounded the previous night, Libby began to grow uneasy. She kept glancing at the alarm switch in the hallway, but no red light glowed. Then she remembered they hadn't retired until twelve-thirty last night and it had been a good half hour after that before the alarm had sounded.

She must have dozed momentarily. She awoke with a start, certain she'd felt something brush the air near her head. It was just before

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one by the glowing digits of her watch. She glanced toward the hallway and froze. The alarm light was showing red!

She rolled over on her back and quickly reached for the flashlight on the table. Holding it in her left hand, she picked up the revolver with her right. Then she felt it again, the feather-light rush of air. She snapped on the flashlight.

It was a bat, swooping and soaring about the room as if seeking an exit. Libby jumped to her feet and hit the light switch. Turning back, she saw the bat fly into the fieldstone fireplace and disappear.

The fireplace! Of course! It had gotten in there somehow a week ago and was unable to find its way back up the chimney! Every night, after the lights were turned out, it flew around the ground floor of the house seeking its freedom, then retreated up the chimney again when the lights went back on. It was as simple as that.

Libby was grinning as she ran up the stairs to break the good news to Frederick Warfer. The light was on in his room, as she knew it would be once the alarm light had shown. "It's all over," she announced, knocking at his half closed door, "I found our intruder."

The silence that greeted her was so ominous, she pushed the door open cautiously.

Frederick Warfer was slumped against the bed by the window. His throat had been cut and he was dead.

Libby had to steady herself against a chair as she looked down at the bloody sight. Then the wave of nausea passed and she looked around the room to make certain the killer wasn't hiding there. She checked the closet and under the bed. The window was open, but it was a good fifteen-foot drop to the ground.

The red alarm light on Warfer's bedside panel was still on. It reminded her of the police and she went to the phone to call them. In almost no time, she heard a squad car pull up.

There were two cars, actually, and Officer Oakes emerged from one. "We figured we'd hear from you tonight," he said.

"Mr. Warfer's been murdered," she told him. "He's upstairs, in his bedroom."

"What?"

"Someone cut his throat."

The young policeman ran up the stairs ahead of her with the two officers from the second car behind him. "So the intruder finally got to him," Oakes said after checking out the body for signs of life.

"No, the intruder who set off the alarm was a bat."

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"Then who—?" He stared at her.

"I don't know. I was downstairs. He was alone up here."

There were other cars pulling up outside and she was thankful to see Sergeant O'Bannion climbing the stairs, followed by some other detectives. "What happened?" he asked.

She told him about the bat and about finding Warfer dead. "He was my client," she heard herself saying. "And now he's dead."

"We lose clients all the time, Libby. Every time a taxpayer is mugged or killed, it's a client we've failed."

"This is a first for me."

"Any ideas about it?" he asked as the lab technicians set about their business.

She glanced at the photograph of Warfer's wife. "Not right now."

"It looks as if the killer either came up the stairs or through the window. Go home and get some rest, Libby. We'll handle it from here."

"Don't you want a statement from me?"

"Come down to the office in the morning."

Still, she felt she had to remain until they took the body away. Frederick Warfer had paid her for the week and she hadn't earned it. Maybe she wouldn't really earn it if she found his killer, either, but it was the least she could try to do now.

On the way out to her car later, she saw Helen Rodney watching from behind her picture window across the street.

Libby stopped by the office in the morning before going to police headquarters. She wanted to look through the mail and tell her secretary what had happened, but instead she found a familiar-looking middle-aged woman waiting in the reception room.

"This is Mrs. Coxe," Janice said from behind her desk. "She'd like to talk with you."

Libby glanced at her watch. It wasn't yet ten and she had a few minutes. If only she could remember where she'd seen the woman before. "Come in, Mrs. Coxe. I have to go out again in ten minutes, but perhaps I can help you."

"I heard on the morning news that Frederick Warfer was killed last night while you were guarding him."

Then it clicked. "The photo in his bedroom! You're Betty Warfer!"

The woman smiled slightly. "Not any more," she said, taking the seat opposite Libby's desk. "That was over two years ago. In fact,

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I'm not really sure I ever was Mrs. Warfer legally. That's why I wanted to see you before I went to the police."

Libby took out the photograph of Monica Forrest. "I think you can help me clear something up. Frederick Warfer told me he'd been married to you for twenty-one years when you left him two years ago. But eleven years ago he had a wife whose maiden name was Monica Forrest—this woman—who disappeared and was never seen again."

Betty Coxe nodded. "I can explain it in one word—bigamy. Frederick had two wives at the same time."

"How did he manage that?"

"He and I lived in the house on Maple Shade Drive. He had another house well out in the suburbs where he lived with Monica. His consultant's business involved a great deal of travel—or so I was always led to believe. He kept up this double life for twenty years or more. I suspect he might have had a child by her. It was never clear which of us he married first, so I don't even know if my marriage was legal. My divorce was, though."

"How did you find out about his other marriage?"

"One day eleven years ago I wanted to use one of his credit cards for some shopping. We needed some yard equipment—a pruning hook for the trees and some shovels to dig up the rose garden and put in some new things. In his wallet I found a credit card in his name but with a different address out in Shady Heights. I asked him about it and he went to pieces. He confessed to a double life and begged me to forgive him. He promised he'd get rid of this other woman, Monica, and be faithful to me. A short time later he told me she'd run off, disappeared. He even filed a missing-persons report with the police but she never turned up."

"What happened to this child you mentioned?"

"Fred never admitted the boy was his. He said it happened about the same time we were married and she used her pregnancy to trap him into marrying her, too. After she disappeared, her brother raised him. I had believed everything Fred said, but about two years ago the brother, Ralph Forrest, came to see me. He told me for the first time that the police suspected Fred of *murdering* Monica. But they hadn't known about his double life and they never found her body. I was horrified."

"Why did her brother come to you at that late date?"

"He'd only just found out about me himself. He was clinging to the hope that Monica was still alive and might have contacted Fred.

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When I couldn't help him, he told me the police theory. Once he put it into words, I realized it might be true. That's when I decided to leave Fred. I got a divorce and have since remarried."

"You say you're going to the police now. For what reason?"

"To tell them what I know. If Monica's brother really suspected Fred of causing her death, he might have had a motive for killing him."

She hesitated. "I just wondered—"

"What?" Libby asked.

"Well, Fred was never one to be without a woman. I wanted to make certain there wasn't another one around who might have had a reason to kill him. I don't want to get the police after Ralph Forrest without cause."

"There was no other woman that I know of," Libby answered. Then she remembered Helen Rodney across the street.

Sergeant O'Bannion listened to Betty Coxe's story and when she had gone he called Libby into his office. "What do you think about this, Libby?"

"I'm not on the force any more," she reminded him. "I don't have to think anything about it."

"Come on, Libby. Give me a break."

"All right—have you questioned the woman who lives across the street? Her name is Helen Rodney. She was at Frederick Warfer's house when I arrived two nights ago. He said she'd been trying to take care of him since Betty left him—"

"Rodney." He shuffled through the reports on his desk. "Sure—young Oakes talked to her last night. I'll read you his report: 'Arrived at Warfer home at one A.M. in response to burglar alarm. All seemed quiet outside the house but noted a neighbor, Helen Rodney, crossing her front yard at number 34. The Rodney woman reported she'd been walking her dog and thought she saw a light in the Warfer garage. Before I could investigate further, patrol car arrived in response to telephone call reporting dead man at Warfer home.' "

"So she was on the prowl last night," Libby said.

"Walking her dog. People do walk their dogs at night."

"A woman alone, at one in the morning?"

"Maybe it's a big attack dog."

"And maybe we should have a look at Warfer's garage."

O'Bannion grinned at her as he got to his feet. "I'll get you back on the force yet, Libby. Let's go . . ."

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When they reached the Warfer home, they found Oakes and a police officer named Skefski just coming out the front door with a large butterfly net. "We caught your bat," Oakes said. "It was in the chimney, all right."

Libby peered at it and made a face. "I hate those things."

She followed O'Bannion into the attached garage and watched while he looked over the accumulation of garden tools, automotive parts, and just plain junk. "The side door was unlocked," O'Bannion pointed out. "Anyone could have come in here. Maybe that woman across the street did see something."

Libby nodded. "The killer could have picked up a pair of garden shears, slipped up the stairs somehow, and killed Warfer."

"Except that the door to the kitchen and the rest of the house was locked on the inside. We need a better theory than that, Libby."

She'd walked over and was examining the long pruning hook leaning against one wall of the garage. It was in two sections that fastened together. Each was six feet long or more and the top section had a curved, saw-toothed blade at the top for cutting high limbs. Looking up at it now, the blade appeared a bit rusty from disuse. Ironic, Libby thought, remembering that it was the pruning hook Betty had been going to buy when she discovered her husband's double life.

"What is it?" O'Bannion asked, following her gaze.

"The garden," she said. "Betty Coxe was buying gardening supplies. They were digging, putting in new things. This was eleven years ago, remember, when she discovered the truth and Warfer promised to break it off. And then the other one, Monica, disappeared. Your officers thought he might have buried her in the back yard but there was no evidence of that. But suppose he put her body in the trunk of his car and drove back over here? Suppose he buried her in *this* back yard?"

O'Bannion was unconvinced. "Why would he do that?"

"They were digging here anyway. Betty told us that. And he'd have been renting or selling the other house after Monica was gone. Much safer to have the unmarked grave here, where he could watch it."

"It makes sense, I suppose." He groaned wearily. "This is a big back yard."

"Not that big when you know what you're looking for." Libby led the way into the yard and headed for the back. "They were digging up the rose garden, she said."

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O'Bannion stood staring at it for a full two minutes, then he gave a yell. "Skefski! Oakes! Grab a couple of shovels from the garage and come back here—we've got some digging to do!"

The two officers shed their Sam Browne belts and started digging up Frederick Warfer's rose garden. They'd been at it about ten minutes when Skefski's shovel encountered something besides roots. "A piece of canvas," he said, peering down into the excavation. "Pretty well rotted away."

"Go easy now," O'Bannion cautioned. "Use your hands."

Libby hated herself for what she was about to do.

"There are bones here," Officer Oakes said, his voice breaking.

"They belong to Monica Forrest," Libby said quite clearly. "They belong to your mother, Mr. Oakes. You thought all along that he killed her. That's why you murdered Frederick Warfer."

She was ready for him to come charging out of the newly uncovered grave in a murderous rage, swinging his shovel at her. Instead, he sank slowly to his knees and wept. "What is all this?" O'Bannion asked, bewildered.

Libby felt drained of emotion. "David Oakes is Monica Forrest's son. Maybe he's Warfer's son, too, but we'll probably never know that for sure. He looks very much like the picture of Monica that her brother gave me, especially his eyes. After his mother disappeared, David was brought up by his uncle, Ralph Forrest, and he changed his name before becoming a police officer. Maybe Forrest suggested Oakes to him. Warfer's double life began at least twenty years ago and Betty told me she thought Monica had a child by him early on. That would make the child in his or her early twenties."

While she spoke, Oakes remained kneeling. Skefski stood by him. Neither man spoke. "How do you know he killed Warfer?" O'Bannion asked quietly.

"In his written report about seeing Helen Rodney walking her dog, he said he came here in response to the burglar alarm. But no alarm sounded because I turned it off myself. The second car came in response to my call. He came here earlier for another reason, and when Helen Rodney saw him prowling around the house moments after he'd killed Warfer, he had to avoid suspicion by questioning her."

"How could he have entered the house?"

"He didn't enter it. Remember that pruning hook in the garage? The blade at the end seemed to me at first to have rust spots, but

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now I think they may be traces of dried blood. Officer Oakes must have noticed it when he searched the house for intruders earlier in the week—and he probably noticed Betty's picture upstairs, too, rather than his mother's. He would remember Warfer after eleven years even if Warfer didn't recognize him. He came here last night, assembled the two sections of the pruning hook in the garage, and went around to the back of the house. The thing is at least twelve feet long with a saw-toothed blade at the end. Held by a man, it could easily reach a second-floor window fifteen feet off the ground. He probably tapped on the window with the blade or threw pebbles at it. Warfer looked out and saw a police officer he knew standing in the yard, opened the window wider, stuck his head out—and got his throat ripped open with that saw-toothed blade."

"I always knew he'd killed her," Oakes said dreamily, still kneeling by the grave. "I was asleep that night but I woke up and heard them fighting. He was going to break it off and leave her. They fought a lot and I went back to sleep. Later he said she left him, but I knew it wasn't true. She'd never have left him without taking me along. My uncle Ralph thought so, too. I joined the police force thinking someday I could find the evidence against him, and when I got called out here this week and saw him, I—"

"I must caution you," O'Bannion interrupted, "that you're entitled to an attorney before making a statement."

"That's all right, Sergeant. I did it and I'd do it again."

O'Bannion motioned to Skefski. "Take him into custody. I'll get that pruning hook from the garage, then—"

"I think I'll go now," Libby said.

"Thanks to you," O'Bannion told her, "we've wrapped up two murders."

"But I wasn't successful in protecting my client's life," Libby said. "He's dead and I don't feel any triumph about finding his killer."

O'Bannion took her arm. "It was probably fate that brought Warfer and Oakes together again after eleven years."

"Fate," said Libby. "Or a bat caught in a chimney."

"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

TIM HEALD

We've celebrated the year 1984 (if one can be said to celebrate the ominous) by publishing a number of somewhat futuristic stories—Henry Slesar's "The Tin Man" in June, Reginald Bretnor's "The New Reality" in September, Jeffry Scott's "The Caring Voices" in December, and now "The Butler Dunnit" by the irreverent, irrepressible, irresistible Tim Heald.

The Colonel had lost his left eye and his wife in an unpleasant incident just north of Rawalpindi and Dame Millicent, a single lady of uncertain age, was a world authority on newts. She was also the very last of the Great Detectives . . .

THE BUTLER DUNNIT

by TIM HEALD

Neither Dame Millicent nor the Colonel was mechanically inclined. If anything went wrong with her washing machine or with his elderly banger (a 1953 Alvis), they sent for what they called "an artisan." If it could be dealt with on the spot by the Colonel's man ("My man Bodger") or the Dame's daily help ("Mrs. Bodger's a treasure, I don't know where I'd be without her"), then so much the better. Left to their own devices, the Dame and the Colonel would have been hard pressed to change a lightbulb or open a can of beans.

Anything to do with Sonny Contractor was therefore an unfathomable mystery to them. Sonny was the founder and life president of Floppy Disk Enterprises, the country's leading manufacturers of household computers and home technology, and he had recently

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acquired Brambledene Hall, the oldest, most haunted house in the village of Brambledene Parva.

Brambledene Parva, a mainly thatched and rose encrusted picture postcard of a place, lay a mile or so off the beaten track between Salisbury and Blandford Forum. For many years, Colonel Freddie Barrington-Potter, otherwise known as "Pukka Chukka," had lived at Rose Cottage, and for slightly longer Dame Millicent Liskeard had lived next door at Thatch Cottage. The Colonel had lost his left eye and his wife in an unpleasant incident just north of Rawalpindi and Dame Millicent, a single lady of uncertain age, was a world authority on newts. She was also the very last of the Great Detectives.

There was nothing untoward in the relationship between the Colonel and the Dame, but there *was* a relationship. They kept their distance, they kept their separate houses, but they were often to be seen together walking their dogs. They were known to compare notes on the *Times* crossword and they shared a degenerate passion for toasted teacakes and the poetry of W. E. Henley. In local society, they hunted as a pair and were hardly ever asked anywhere individually. So it was scarcely surprising that on the evening of February fourteenth, for which Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Contractor issued formal invitations to a dinner party, the Colonel and the Dame both received stiff white "At Home" cards telling them to turn up at the Hall at 7:30 for 8:00. A message in the bottom right-hand corner above the R.S.V.P. said cryptically, "To meet Butler."

"What the devil d'you imagine Sonny means by it?" asked the Colonel as the Alvis growled up the drive. "I mean who is this chap Butler?"

"I haven't the foggiest, Freddie," said the Dame, powdering her nose irritably, "but I doubt that it's a chap. Could be a dog. But I suspect it's his latest invention. A thing."

"I imagined it was a chap called Butler," said the Colonel, equally irritably. "What makes you think it isn't?"

"Because if it was a chap, Sonny would have given him a Christian name. Even a foreigner like Sonny knows one doesn't use simple surnames except for dogs or things."

"Ah," said the Colonel, pulling up sharply in a swirl of gravel, "I follow you. Another of Sonny's little jokes."

"Sonny's little jokes, as you call them, make him more than a million a year." The Dame was being unusually crisp. "Difficult to see the funny side of that."

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"Quite." The Colonel pulled the front doorbell and they waited, stamping gently in the chill winter's night.

Presently they heard doors opening inside the big house, though oddly enough no footsteps. Normally, Sonny came to the door himself and the steel caps of his bootheels echoed noisily and distinctively on the flagged floors. Particularly in view of his limp.

"Doesn't sound like Sonny," remarked the Colonel, blowing on his gloves.

"I think you'll find it's Butler," said the Dame rather smugly. And then as the door opened she said, graciously, to the figure standing in front of them, "Why, good evening, Butler."

To which the figure responded in plummy but slightly expressionless tones, "Good evening modom, good evening sir. Welcome to Brambledene Hall. Please step this way."

"Thank you, Butler," said the Dame, entering graciously and muttering over her shoulder, "Come along, Freddie. Don't just stand there."

The Colonel followed, looking foxed. The reason for this was that the person with whom the Dame was conversing did not seem quite human. It wore striped trousers and a black jacket and it had a mobile, florid face, with a mouth that opened and shut, but with oddly jerky movements. It did not walk in quite the conventional way, either, but shimmered across the floor like a hovercraft. It also appeared to have lost both hands since at the end of each arm was an array of shiny steel bits and pieces—rather like the interesting contraptions built into those extremely useful Swiss Army knives.

"Rum-looking sort of cove," whispered the Colonel into Dame Millicent's right ear as he handed his overcoat to the servant. "Looks as if he's got one of those things for taking the stones out of horse's shoes instead of a thumb."

"It *is* a thing for removing stones from horse's shoes," said Butler in the same expressionless voice.

The Colonel flushed. "I say, old boy, I'm most fearfully sorry. I—"

He was interrupted by a voice from above. Sonny Contractor, in a fuchsia smoking-jacket, was standing in the minstrel's gallery, smiling. "Another of Sonny's little jokes, Colonel," he said.

The Colonel went a darker shade of beetroot. "Come along, both of you," continued Sonny. "We're in the library. You'll have to excuse Butler. We haven't found a way of getting him up and down stairs, so he'll come up in the lift from the pantry." He shifted his voice to one of command. "We'll see you in the library, Butler," he called.

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"Very well sir," intoned Butler and slid off through a green-baize door.

"Isn't he clever?" Sonny purred with pride as his guests climbed the staircase toward him. "A micro-computer basically, but we've built in a colossal memory and written this sensational SERVIDO program for it. And a number of mechanical refinements I won't bore you with."

"And you'll be flooding the market with them," presumed the Dame.

"Butler's a prototype," said Sonny, leading the way toward the library, "but my people have just about got a production model ready and we expect to have them in the stores before next Christmas. Ten thousand each, and virtually no maintenance. An absolute bargain when you think how impossible it is to get staff these days. Let alone pay them."

They all smiled in agreement as Sonny ushered them into the library, which was long and vaulted and covered with wall-to-wall books purchased by the yard.

Sonny made the introductions. There were his wife, Mechtilde, the fifth Mrs. Contractor, half his age, blonde, beautiful, and his bride of only six months; Arthur Bletchley, owner of a chain of computer boutiques called Bytes and Bits; Mrs. Bletchley, who looked as frumpish as her husband; Piers Cartwright, the willowy young computer correspondent of the BBC; and a professor of computer technology from the University of Northern New Mexico, William Hall. This last named was a house guest of the Contractors. The rest had simply come for dinner—the Bletchleys had a country cottage in the Chalke valley and Cartwright was staying with his parents, who had an estate somewhere near Wimborne.

"Colonel Barrington-Potter and Dame Millicent are our non-experts," said Sonny. "I thought we could do with some lay opinions. People who know about computers can be fearfully blasé." He turned to the latest arrivals. "I've just been explaining that this is partly a business occasion. I wanted to put Butler through his paces for a moment or two, just to show these good people what he can really do."

At this moment Butler entered, bearing drinks on a tray.

"Just put them over there on the sofa table, Butler," said Sonny. Butler did as he was told.

"Now," said Sonny in his best showman's manner, "Butler is the nearest anyone has come to creating a mechanical human being.

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He's a bit stiff, but he's very versatile and utterly obedient. The program is complicated, but he is not. He has been designed to respond to simple commands, although we do have a built-in code so that I can talk to him confidentially without you understanding. For instance: 'I thought today's crossword unusually difficult.' " He paused and everyone watched as Butler moved to the grate and put another log on the fire. Sonny laughed. "Chilly weather we're having, Butler," he said.

"It is a trifle inclement," said Butler.

Sonny grinned. "There's an article in the *Field* I'd like Colonel Barrington-Potter to have a look at, Butler," he said.

Butler went to the magazine rack, picked the latest issue unerringly from among its competitors, and handed it to the Colonel with a pair of tongs which flicked out from his right arm.

And so it went on. Butler fetched and carried, bowed and scraped until, had he been human, he would have been blue in the face. Being a machine, he remained smooth as his ball-bearings could make him.

"Whose patent is he?" asked Piers Cartwright eventually. "I mean, who invented him?"

"Oh, he's a Floppy Disk brainchild," said Sonny rather rapidly, "absolutely revolutionary concept."

Cartwright looked thoughtful. "Funny thing," he said, "I was reading the other day that some East German academic had come up with plans for a machine very much like this. Leipzig University, I believe. I read his article in a learned magazine. Name of Wernher Heitz . . ."

"I—" Both Mrs. Contractor and Professor Hall began to speak simultaneously, then ground to an embarrassed halt as they realized they were interrupting each other. Mechtilde Contractor resumed first.

"I was just going to say, darling, that while we go on talking it might be nice if Butler gave everyone a drink."

Sonny agreed. Butler slid over to Dame Millicent, who ordered a Scotch "not too heavy on the water." Professor Hall looked rather white.

"No, this chap Heitz," continued Cartwright, "has a blueprint for something very like our friend here."

"Forgive me, my dear Piers." Sonny Contractor sounded silky. "For a Communist academic to invent such an essentially capitalist plaything is surely a little improbable."

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"Oh," said Cartwright, "they have slave labor on their side of the Iron Curtain, too."

"Rather different," said Sonny. "In any case, whatever this man Heitz may or may not have done, ours is an entirely original conception. We don't have to borrow from anyone else."

Cartwright shrugged. "I suppose not," he said. "I did hear that Heitz had defected to the West. Not working for you, I suppose?"

It was Contractor's turn to shrug. "Not that I'm aware of. And if he was, then what of it?"

This dialogue obviously bored the rest of the party, for it swiftly fragmented into smaller groups. Dame Millicent drifted over to Professor Hall, who had just taken out a silvery cigarette case, curiously old-fashioned with his initials monogrammed in Gothic. He offered her one, but she declined. "A cigar after dinner if the port's good enough," she smiled.

At that moment, Butler came up to them and inquired what the professor would like to drink. The professor said he'd like a dry martini, straight up with a twist of lemon. Dame Millicent sipped her whisky thoughtfully. "I thought, coming from New Mexico, that you'd test his programing by asking for a sopaipilla cocktail with a slice of lime."

"And salt round the rim of the glass." The professor laughed a touch nervously.

The Dame laughed with him. "How I love a good sopaipilla," she said.

The professor agreed as they watched Butler shaking the martini and then paring a sliver of peel from a fresh lemon. He used a thin stiletto on his right hand.

"Goodness gracious," said the Dame abruptly, "do please forgive me. I seem to have left my spectacles downstairs in my overcoat." And she hurried out. Which was all rather peculiar as she had perfect vision and had never worn glasses in her life.

When she returned a few minutes later, the party was in full swing. Everyone had drinks and it was clear that Butler had mixed them well and strong. The Colonel was chatting to the Bletchleys. Sonny Contractor and Piers Cartwright were still arguing. Mechtilde Contractor and Professor Hall were having an apparently intimate conversation in a corner. The Dame's forensic gaze moved across this happy scene as, quite suddenly, a silence fell on it, the

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way silences sometimes inexplicably do. It was filled by a compliment from the professor.

"You know something, Butler," he said, speaking with slow, almost ponderous sincerity, "this is the best goddamn martini I've had east of Manhattan."

The reaction of Butler was sudden and surprising and lethal. For a second you could almost hear the micro chips clicking. Then he slid very fast toward his master, and before anyone could prevent it the right arm was raised, there was a flash of steel, and the thin blade of the lemon-paring stiletto plunged into Sonny Contractor's chest three times and with all the force and precision at a machine's command. Sonny fell to the floor, dead.

Stunned silence followed. Then Mechtilde Contractor began to sob. Her cries were terrible heaving gasps, incoherent expressions of indescribable anguish. Professor Hall, standing close to her, put a comforting arm around her shoulder and whispered to her soothingly. In the center of the room stood Butler, the murderous machine, blood dripping from the knife at the end of his right arm.

Only he seemed totally devoid of emotion.

The first person to speak was Dame Millicent, and when she did she spoke in a decisive, even steely fashion which very much surprised those present, like Cartwright and the Bletchleys, who did not know her well. They had taken her simply at face value. They had assumed that she was what she seemed—an amiable old bat with an Eton crop and an eccentric obsession with newts, the sort of elderly spinster who is as prevalent in the English countryside as Norman churches or Victorian rectories. Dotty but harmless.

They were quite wrong.

"Everybody please remain exactly where they are," she said softly. "No one is to leave the room. Freddie—kindly phone for the police and tell them that we have apprehended a murderer at Brambledene Hall."

The Colonel gulped. "Come off it, Millicent," he said, "you can't expect them to arrest a machine."

"Don't be ridiculous, Freddie," said the Dame quietly. "Machines don't commit murders. It's the hand on the trigger that matters. Butler didn't kill Sonny Contractor on his own initiative. He did it because he was programed to do it on command." She looked from one to the other of them. "Someone here ordered Butler to kill Sonny. Someone managed to slip a little extra something into his program.

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Someone who knew where Sonny's control room is—someone who could get in there and had the expertise to do the necessary."

"That's preposterous." Professor Hall's voice was curiously strangulated. "I've never heard such nonsense. You know nothing about it. It's not possible. The machine simply went off the rails. It was an accident—a horrible accident. You saw what happened. That's not murder. It's a dreadful mistake. There was a fault in the machine."

"You were not to know, Professor, that I have recently completed a Ph.D. in computerology with the Open University. Oddly enough, I found computer programing quite easy—much more like learning Latin or Greek than science." She paused. "You make a very poor criminal, Professor. Even an amateur such as yourself should have found out something about New Mexico before claiming to come from its university. When I suggested you might like a sopaipilla cocktail with a slice of lime, you implied that salt around the rim of the glass was a regular touch. But anyone who lived in New Mexico would know that you have salt with a margarita and that a sopaipilla is a local variant of Indian fried bread."

The room was very quiet.

"So you see," the Dame continued, "I realized you were an impostor at once. And when I saw the Gothic script on your cigarette case, I guessed who you actually were."

She turned to Piers Cartwright. "Though I have you to thank for that," she said. "For unless I'm very much mistaken, this gentleman is none other than Wernher Heitz, original inventor of the Butler machine. It is plain to me that you, Doktor or Professor Heitz, believed that Sonny Contractor had stolen your invention and that with the help of Mrs. Contractor, who I would deduce is probably your sister—or perhaps even a girl friend, though that is immaterial—you were able to infiltrate the control room and add one deadly command to the computer program. Your compliments to the machine on the dry martini were the signal for murder. That was the squeeze on the trigger."

The Dame drained her glass of whisky and allowed herself a thin smile of triumph.

"Very well," said Heitz, German accent suddenly quite marked, "I congratulate you. I sent my plans to Contractor. He never acknowledged my letter. But he stole my ideas."

He released his arm from the now dry-eyed Mechtilde. "And you are right. My sister Mechtilde was part of my plan for revenge." He

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paused and then, before anyone could react, his hand had gone inside his jacket and reemerged from the shoulder holster clutching a small but sinister snub-nosed revolver. It was trained firmly on the Dame.

"Mechtilde and I are leaving now," he said, "and I would not advise you to follow. You have seen how lethal Butler can be. I have programed him to prevent any of you moving from this room until three hours after our departure. Any attempt to disobey will prove fatal." He grinned. "Butler is a brilliant conception. He does not make mistakes."

The Dame seemed remarkably at ease.

"Very clever, Heitz," she said. "Very clever indeed." She turned to the immobile Butler. "I think, Butler, I'd rather like another glass of Scotch."

The instant she uttered these words, Butler came to life once more. Noiselessly and with incredible speed, he shimmered across the floor, knocked the pistol from Heitz's hand with a single deft karate chop, and had him in an inescapable double Nelson before he could even move.

The Dame smiled. "You see," she told Heitz, "you're not the only one who can program a computer."

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

MYSTERY SURVEY: We're always fascinated by what's popular among hard-core mystery enthusiasts, and a recent survey of subscribers to *The Armchair Detective* brought 847 replies to questions about favorite mystery authors, characters, and novels. The top twenty vote-getters were listed in each category, and the five favorite authors proved to be Arthur Conan Doyle, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, Dorothy L. Sayers, and Rex Stout.

Favorite characters closely paralleled this list, with Sherlock Holmes, Philip Marlowe, Peter Wimsey, and Nero Wolfe coming out on top. In a survey taken by *EQMM* some twelve years ago, a question about favorite detective characters ranked Holmes first, followed by Hercule Poirot, Ellery Queen, and Nero Wolfe. Wimsey and Marlowe barely made the top dozen. Now Poirot and Queen are tied for ninth place, and tastes seem to have shifted toward Marlowe and Wimsey, at least temporarily.

Among the favorite novels, the top five in *TAD*'s survey are Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles,* Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon,* Chandler's *The Big Sleep,* Sayers' *Gaudy Night,* and Christie's *And Then There Were None.*

MYSTERY LETTERZINE: A couple of issues back we mentioned a new fan publication, *Mystery & Detective Monthly,* consisting almost entirely of letters from fans discussing various mystery topics. The first two issues are now at hand, and they prove to be far more interesting than one might expect, mainly because the fan letter-writers are people like Donald Yates, Marvin Lachman, Greg Goode, Art Scott, Bill Crider, Robert E. Briney, William Campbell Gault, Mike Nevins, Jon L. Breen, and Bob Randisi, among others. About three-quarters of the fanzine's 24 pages are devoted to letters, with the rest given over to an editorial and a comprehensive listing of current books, some with brief reviews. Sample issues are $2.00 each, with a 12-issue subscription priced at $19.00 in the U.S. and Canada. Overseas prices are $4.00 per issue

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airmail, from Bob Napier, 14411-C South C Street, Tacoma, WA 98444.

MORE CLASSICS FROM BRITAIN: No one loves to reprint classic mysteries more than British publishers, and Hogarth Press has launched a new Hogarth Crime series, promising trade paperback editions of eleven books during the next year or so. Included are Rex Stout's *The Hand in the Glove,* Anthony Berkeley's *The Dead Mrs. Stratton,* Margery Allingham's *The Beckoning Lady,* Freeman Wills Crofts's *Inspector French's Greatest Case,* and Elliot Paul's *The Mysterious Mickey Finn.* Some titles will be distributed in America, and all should be available through leading mystery bookshops.

SIMENON: We're a bit late mentioning Georges Simenon's *Intimate Memoirs* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, $22.95), which attracted considerable review attention in early summer. Readers will find little about the Maigret books or Simenon's other novels in this 815-page memoir, but a great deal about Simenon the man. His life is, we trust, not typical of the lives of mystery writers, but it's fascinating.

SUSPENSE SHORTS: Fred S. Tobey, a familiar name in mystery magazines during the 1960s and early 1970s, has collected 25 of his stories in a new paperback, *Never Hit a Lady* ($3.95 from Bay Books of Brewster, PO Box L, Brewster, MA 02631). Most are criminous, from *Alfred Hitchcock's Mystery Magazine, Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine,* the old *Saint Magazine,* and other publications. A few humorous tales are also included.

P. D. JAMES: Scribners has published its third omnibus of P. D. James novels, *Trilogy of Death* ($15.95), including *Death of an Expert Witness, Innocent Blood,* and *The Skull Beneath the Skin.* We hear that the first collection of P. D. James short stories is due next year.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: The sequel to Len Deighton's *Berlin Game,* mentioned here two issues back, is *Mexico Set,* coming from Knopf in January. The novels comprise the first two parts of a trilogy titled *Game, Set & Match,* so we can look forward to the *Match* novel in January of 1986.

Robert J. Randisi's novel, *The Ham Reporter,* coming from Doubleday next year, is a historical mystery that teams up Bat Masterson and Damon Runyon to solve a murder in New York City in 1911.

A new collection of Stephen King's short stories, *Skeleton Crew,* will be published in the spring.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

It started first with the phenomenal success of *Who Killed the Robins Family?*, the whodunit book published without an ending which offered $10,000 as a prize for the correct solution. This was followed by the paperback, *Prize Meets Murder*, giving a $15,000 award for the right finish. Now, interestingly and uniquely, the solve-the-mystery-puzzle-for-cash craze has advanced to the visual arts, with the stakes advanced as well. All that is required is the purchase of a video cassette called *Money Hunt* ("The original mystery movie that you can solve and win $100,000")—priced under thirty dollars—to match wits with Cash Hunt, private detective, in "The Mystery of the Missing Link."

The tape starts with a host, the affable John Hillerman, whose association with the mystery genre includes being the urbane sidekick to *Magnum, P.I.* as well as a running part in the *Ellery Queen* television series as an officious radio commentator. (He was also in *Chinatown.)* Standing in front of a massive bank vault flanked by guards, Hillerman winks: "Somewhere in a safety deposit box much like these" is the money for any viewer to win, needing only some "skill, knowledge, and deduction." The clues are all logically connected—no luck or chance are involved—although, "needless to say, we have thrown in some amusing red herrings."

However, this whodunit doesn't require fingering a killer—or, as in the case of the Robins affair (the solution to which having just been made public), multiple murderers. This case can be closed with the identification of "a region somewhere in the world, a city within that region, and a safety deposit number." Sound easy and somewhat innocuous? The caper which unfolds, directed by actor David Hemmings and written by Gregory Ross, is surprisingly cryptic.

The story itself starts with a wonderful undercurrent of music, a blues saxophone, and a haunting woman's voice reminiscent of the *noir* films of the Forties. Cash Hunt himself, although he is balding, stocky, and middle-aged, is endearing, and his rich voice-over narration makes Chandler seem terse.

Staggering through a Los Angeles seared by an oppressive summer heat-wave, flicking cigarette butts into any handy gutter, Cash moans: "The city was a desert, and we were living like snakes, hiding under rocks all day and lying in the roads by night, and there wasn't anyone I'd meet who wasn't coiled and ready to strike." He is desperate for a client, and gets one—but the sultry, mysterious voice on the telephone asking him to find miss-

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ing money doesn't give her name.

The few clues she does drop sends Cash on a harried scavenger hunt strewn with surreal props and extraordinary characters. Cash receives his retainer: a single dollar bill with a circle drawn around the eye above the pyramid. A styrofoam mannequin delivers a baffling mailgram. A seemingly empty-headed waitress stalks Cash, finally moving into his apartment. As does a fortune teller whose accent wavers from Pakistani to Brooklynese. As does, as well, a blind (!) airlines pilot. "The heat was beginning to get inside our brains."

Rather than a crisp mystery yarn, *Money Hunt* unfolds like a vague and slippery dream. "There were two things standing in my way," Cash moans, "I did not know who I was working for and what I was after." As these points factor in the solution, he is no wiser as the drama finishes. Like Alice's wanderings through Wonderland, nothing seems to make sense, yet there is a sort of mathematical undercurrent. And it is intriguingly directed.

(David Hemmings, this time behind the camera, can be remembered as the lead in two worthwhile mysteries, *Blow Up* and *Deep Red.* More recently, he appeared as a Scotland Yard inspector in the Sherlock Holmes puzzle, *Murder by Decree.* Last year Hemmings directed an absorbing courtroom shocker, *Beyond Reasonable Doubt.)*

Host John Hillerman is even more arch in the epilogue to *Money Hunt,* giving the contest rules (there will be a tie-breaker mystery should there be more than one winner) and presenting "a list of books we found useful in creating this puzzle." That list includes—among many other titles—two encyclopedias, an almanac, an atlas, and a book on hang-gliding. Speaking of the mystery, Hillerman says with a smile: "I've struggled with it myself. I won't pretend it's easy—but it *is* fun."

It is.

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THE JURY BOX

by ALLEN J. HUBIN

Anthologies typically and usefully have an organizing theme. One such early theme, subsequently rather lapsing into disuse, involved authors selecting their own favorite stories—thus, for example, *My Best Detective Story* (1931), *My Best Spy Story* (1938), *My Best Mystery Story* (1939).

This good idea is revived in this year's anthology from the Mystery Writers of America. Thirty-nine

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years and thirty-nine presidents have served the organization, and the thirteen still-active presidents offer the favorite story from among their short mysteries in *The Crime of My Life* (Walker, $14.95), edited by Brian Garfield, last year's office holder. The fare is choice and varied, from intrigue in ancient China (by Helen McCloy), to impossible crime (Edward D. Hoch), to the adventures of a man who killed wives for a living (Robert Bloch), to a mood piece on the terror of the meek (Georges Simenon). An introduction to each story by its author adds nicely to the pleasure.

Coincidentally, this same theme is also pursued in *Top Crime* (St. Martin's, $14.95), edited by Josh Pachter. Here 24 contemporary authors select and introduce their favorites. The result is an assemblage of notable tales, some suffering a bit from being very frequently anthologized, others rewardingly unfamiliar.

Child's Ploy (Macmillan, $15.95), edited by Bill Pronzini and Marcia Muller, ranges to the edges of our genre. The theme—crime by, to, around children—is worked out in impressive fashion. Among the nineteen authors represented are some from outside the field—D. H. Lawrence, Katherine Mansfield, Willa Cather, William Saroyan, Stephen Vincent Benet—and excellent contributions by more familiar names—Q. Patrick, Graham Greene, Cornell Woolrich, and Charlotte Armstrong. One of the best anthologies in recent years.

Through a Glass, Darkly (Beaufort, $16.95), edited by Barry Woelfel, explores an anthological theme not, I think, previously chanced upon: it offers "13 tales of wine and crime," and zestfully do they rest upon the palate, too. The stories are for the most part less familiar and all the more welcome for it. Authors include Stanley Ellin, E. C. Bentley, Roald Dahl, Henry Cecil, Arthur C. Clarke, O. Henry, and Michael Gilbert.

The latest anthology from this magazine is the usual treat. *Crimes and Punishments* (Dial, $12.95), edited by Eleanor Sullivan and Karen A. Prince, contains 21 stories from 1947–1978. Luminaries in our field are here—James M. Cain, Michael Gilbert, Michael Innes, Ellery Queen; others less familiar and from earlier years—Eleazar Lipsky and Don Mankiewicz; and important more recent practitioners—Bill Pronzini, Lawrence Block, Brian Garfield, and Jack Ritchie.

Turning to novels, Ted Wood, whose fine debut *(Dead in the Water)* won the 1983 Scribner Crime Novel Award, does even better in *Murder on Ice* (Scribners, $12.95). Now it's winter in Murphy's Harbor, Ontario, and the Ice Festival beauty contest is interrupted by a kidnaping. A snowfall turns into a serious storm, isolating the town and limiting travel to snowmobiles, leaving the one-man police force, Reid Bennett, with only the resources of his own strength and intelligence. Crackling suspense produced by excellent integration of setting, character, and devious plotting.

Doubleday's admirable scheme

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to make the works of Edward Candy available in this country has reached *Which Doctor* ($11.95), the only Candy novel to be published here (by Rinehart in 1954) on original appearance. This, too, is a delightfully stylish narrative, creatively cast and set in an English children's hospital. Dr. Sandeman, a cold and cutting person, reaps what he sows and dies of a blow to the head. Fabian Honeychurch, on site as a visiting professor, amateur sleuth, and potential suspect, wonders with Inspector Burnival how Sandeman's demise connects with the disappearance—kidnaping? murder?—of a nine-year-old patient.

Charlotte MacLeod's latest about the Kelling clan of Boston and environs is *The Convivial Codfish* (Doubleday, $11.95), a piece of genial nonsense. It seems certain members of this moneyed band of eccentrics gather for a Scrooge celebration around Christmas. But its elected leader, the Exalted Chowderhead, loses his Great Chain of office and acquires a broken hip, while a private trainload of the clan ends up in the hospital from poisoned caviar, with two in the morgue. Private eye Max Bittersohn, attached to this madness through marriage to the beauteous Sarah Kelling, commissions himself to find out whose "normal" looniness has taken a deadly left turn.

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a *NEW* short story by

JON L. BREEN

"All kinds of psychic phenomena fascinate me," Algy said, "spirit recording especially. I've studied all the authorities and researchers in the field . . . I'm fascinated by the messages they've gotten from beyond the grave from people like Churchill, Ortega y Gasset, and Conan Doyle. And of course I share your determination to find out who killed poor Judy . . ."

SPIRIT RECORDING

by JON L. BREEN

It was raining hard and Richard French's little bookshop on Fourteenth Street had a very closed look about it. The door had been shut against the elements and the usual outdoor table of bargain books had been pulled inside. But Algy Wilburforce had an appointment, so he knew French would be there.

As Algy came through the door, he gathered himself in to avoid dripping on any books. The bookseller gave him an economical wave from his usual seat behind the old oak desk. From French this was an effusive greeting. "Glad you could make it in this weather, Algy," he said.

French cleared a stack of *National Geographic*s from a chair and invited his visitor to sit down. Algy had no idea what the subject of the conversation was to be. It was unprecedented for this book dealer only a commercial acquaintance, to beckon him to a meeting. "Are others coming?" Algy asked.

"Later," French said. He lit his pipe with studied deliberation.

Algy hadn't been in the shop recently. Financial reverses had denied him the supreme pleasure of buying books and the day outside typified his mood for the last few weeks. In fact, he was on the

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point of selling some of his collection, a desperate step indeed, and had almost brought along a box of his less cherished first editions. In better weather, he would have.

"I think you need some money," French said after a prolonged silence.

"You've heard, then?"

"I've heard nothing. But I knew that only impecuniousness could keep you away from the shop for so long."

"You're right."

Again the bookseller's pause seemed interminable. Finally he said, "Do you ever see Harry Bryant?"

"Not since his wife's funeral."

"You were there when it happened, weren't you?"

"Yes. It was awful."

"Bryant thinks she was murdered."

"No, I'm sure it was an accident. I always worried about that low balcony outside their apartment. Heights make me dizzy anyway. Judy wandered out there by herself. She'd had a bit too much to drink. She tripped—"

"Pretty careless for someone who lived there."

"Judy was a careless woman in many ways."

"Bryant thinks somebody at that party pushed her."

"Ridiculous," Algy said.

"Bryant was in here yesterday looking for books on spirit recordings. He believes he can contact Judy that way and she'll tell him who killed her. And why."

"Spirit recordings? I can't see Harry Level-headed Bryant going for that kind of thing, can you?"

"I can and did see him going for it right here in this shop. He bought a copy of a book called *Voices from the Tapes* by Peter Bander that's been gathering dust on my shelves for years. Bryant plans to sit in an empty room with his tape recorder going and ask questions into the air. He thinks when he plays back the tape, he'll get answers. From the other side."

Algy didn't know whether to laugh or shiver. "That's very interesting, French, but why the devil did you ask me here? I have enough troubles of my own without taking on Harry Bryant's."

"It just seemed to me that anyone who was at that party that night would have cause to worry. What if the spirit of Judy Bryant puts her finger on you?"

"I'm not worried."

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"Or on the other hand, what if the spirit puts the finger on your cousin Emil Krantz? Eh? What about that, Algy?"

Emil Krantz. He'd been at the party, too. A fellow collector of first editions, irritatingly often the same ones Algy went after, and another of French's customers. More significantly, he was the only person standing between Algy Wilburforce and a million-dollar inheritance under the terms of their ailing Uncle Mortimer's will. Algy was next in line.

But Algy still didn't see what advantage could accrue from the matter of Harry Bryant's spirit recordings. "So what?" he said. "Even if Emil did it, and I don't see why he would have, and even if some tape gives out with his name, or Harry thinks it does, it's not evidence enough to convict anybody on. And since the death penalty is more or less a thing of the past, Emil's conviction of murder could only help me if the victim were Uncle Mortimer."

"Think more carefully, Algy. Harry will know any charge on the tape, however much he might believe it, would not convict a murderer. So what do you think Harry will do when he gets the word from Judy's shade that Emil killed her? He'll take the law into his own hands, won't he? Murder Emil. There you see the potential benefit. You'd be able to continue with your collecting, even send me to Europe to hunt books for you. So a certain advantage would be mine as well, wouldn't it?"

"Yes," Algy said. "But what's the point of all this? Are you implying that the tape could be faked somehow?"

French was silent, drawing on his pipe and looking smug.

"Would you know how to do it?" Algy demanded.

The outline of a figure appeared at the window of the shop. "I think my other guest is here," French said.

"I didn't know you were interested in this kind of thing," Harry Bryant said on an evening one week later, looking at his visitor with some suspicion.

"Oh, yes," Algy Wilburforce assured him. "All kinds of psychic phenomena fascinate me, spirit recording especially. I've studied all the authorities and researchers in the field—von Szalay, Jurgenson, Raudive, Welch, the TV writer; the Lamoreaux brothers." A handy paperback summary, Susy Smith's *Voices of the Dead*? (Signet, 1977), had given Algy the proper names to drop. "I'm fascinated by the messages they've gotten from beyond the grave from people like Churchill, Ortega y Gasset, and Conan Doyle. And of course I share

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your determination to find out who killed poor Judy. Most important of all, I really think you need a witness."

Harry Bryant sighed. "I suppose so. This is an intimate experience to share with anyone else, but if anything should come of it, it's important that someone should be able to attest to the honesty of the experiment besides me. Well, I guess we might as well get started. I've been doing this for a week, at eight o'clock every night. As you know, it's considered important to establish a regular time to talk to the spirits. I don't have any firm results yet, but the last couple of nights I have gotten some interesting sounds, something like voices but nothing understandable. This may be the night, Algy."

"I hope I bring you luck."

"I'll ask the initial question, and then we must just sit here in complete silence. We'll give it an hour and then play it back and see what we have."

"Fine," Algy said, expecting a long and uncomfortable hour.

They sat in easy chairs on either side of the flat coffee table and Harry switched on the tape recorder. It was one of the best reel-to-reel models and it seemed to subscribe to all the features Algy's paperback cramming-guide said a machine used for spirit recordings ought to have, low noise being the most important.

Harry picked up the mike. "Judy, this is Harry. This is Harry, Judy. Please, if you're here, give us some sign. We want to know if you're well, if you're happy where you are. I know you were murdered, Judy. I believe that with all my soul. And I want to know who killed you. I want to do justice, Judy, to the person who killed you. Please tell me his name. The tape is running now, and we will leave it on so you can give us a message. Please do your best, Judy. Algy Wilburforce is here with me, Judy. You remember Algy, I know. He wants to know who killed you, too, Judy. So please try to tell us."

Algy was starting to think Harry was going to fill the whole tape with his imprecations. But finally he seemed to be finished. He sat back in his chair and closed his eyes. Algy performed his first, and easier, duty of the evening: pressing the OFF button on the remote-control microphone concealed under his coat. That would give Richard French and his electronics-expert friend the word that Harry was finished and it was time to work on the duplicate tape they had in an apartment directly above.

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Algy sat back in nervous silence to await his next, and more difficult, duty.

After a little more than a half hour of silence, Harry reached over and switched off the recorder. By clicking the mike in his pocket on and off, Algy was able to signal French and his friend that the recording was finished.

"I have to know, Algy," Harry said. "We're going to have something tonight. I can feel it. There's been plenty of time for Judy to get through. Let's play it back."

"Harry," Algy said hastily, "this is making me jumpy as a cat. Why don't we have a little drink before we play it back? The toll on my nerves is incredible."

"But, Algy, I want to—"

"You could use one, too, couldn't you, Harry? Go get us a drink, and by the time you get back I'll have the tape ready to play back."

"All right, Algy," Harry said. Fortunately, his impulses as a good host were strong. "What'll it be?"

"Scotch and water, light on the latter."

Harry lumbered to the kitchen.

Algy took the reel off the machine and dashed to the patio door as quickly and silently as he could. As scheduled, a little basket was being lowered from the floor above with an identical reel of tape in it. He quickly made the substitution and darted back to put the new reel on the machine. He had it rewound and ready to play as Harry came back with the drinks.

"Okay, let's hear it," Harry said.

As he heard his own voice on the tape, Harry was immediately worried. "That's not as good quality as I generally get," he said. "If the damn thing doesn't pick up *me* properly, how can we expect—?"

"Give it a chance, Harry," Algy said. "Your voice is coming through strong and clear."

But although it sounded fine to him, Algy reflected that Harry Bryant was probably right that it wasn't as crisp as he would normally expect. French's friend had assured them that remote-control mike was state-of-the-art, but it probably couldn't duplicate a recording made actually on the machine in the room.

Harry's voice finished its long-winded appeal to the spirits, and they both listened intently to the silence.

After a minute or two, a small, faint voice, high-pitched and talk

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ing at a speed about twice that of normal speech, said, "Candy is dandy, but liquor is quicker."

Harry Bryant's mouth fell open. "Judy," he said softly.

The old Ogden Nash couplet had been a favorite of theirs, a private joke between them, but very few of their friends knew about it. Algy, of course, was one and had passed it along to French as a worthwhile first message, to establish the credibility of the voice. It didn't sound much like Judy, but under the circumstances of speed and distortion, who could tell for sure? French and his friend had done a good job of making it sound like real—or claimed-to-be-real—spirit recordings Algy had heard. It gave him a bit of a chill, though he knew very well it was faked.

Several more moments of silence passed. Then: "It's cold on the other side," so quickly you could barely understand it. Very good.

Harry was leaning forward, staring at the recorder as if it were a religious icon. He was buying it, no question about it. The next statement should pin her murder on Algy's cousin, Emil Krantz. The original plan had been to have her say, "Emil killed me," but that had seemed too easy to misunderstand. The conspirators had finally settled on, "It was Emil Krantz," making the name very clear.

More minutes passed. Algy felt cold sweat on his neck. He hoped nothing had gone wrong, that there hadn't been a hitch in their plans. Maybe they'd run out of time when Harry had turned off the tape earlier than expected.

Then the voice said, "The murderer is Algy Wilburforce."

Algy sat upright in his chair. He saw Harry looking at him with a terrifying glint in his eye. Algy rose and started to back up toward the patio door.

"Harry, I don't know what she's saying—that is, whoever it is is saying. It's not Judy. It's—it's an evil ghost from beyond the grave, an old enemy of mine. It's—it's a malevolent spirit. It's the devil."

Algy was thinking fast, trying to argue out of it in supernatural terms. In mundane terms, he was also wondering what had happened. Had French and his friend double-crossed him? But they'd had an honest business arrangement, Algy reflected indignantly. Had the spirit of Judy gotten through and actually fingered him from beyond the grave? If so, she was in the wrong apartment, but that might not present much of an obstacle to a ghost. But it must have been French. Algy considered what he would do to French if

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he ever saw the book dealer again. But that was becoming increasingly more unlikely.

Harry Bryant wasn't bothering to speak. He was coming toward the patio door.

"It was an accident!" Algy shouted. "I did kill her, Harry, but it was just an accident!" What caused the accident—her rebuff of his continual advances and his burst of anger—he wouldn't bother to mention. His confession didn't appear to be doing any good anyway.

Algy looked for a means of escape, knowing that once he went out on the patio, he would be thrown over the low railing to die like Judy. But he soon realized there was no other escape route open to him. He scurried out to the patio, leaping to find a handhold on the ledge above. He kicked out at Harry with his feet, but it was useless. Harry had his arms around Algy's legs and was tearing him away from his handhold. Algy felt his grip loosen and suddenly was seeing the street far below come closer and closer and closer.

The three men in the room above had gathered up their equipment and reached the street by the time Algy Wilburforce fell.

"I don't have the stomach for this," the electronics man said. "I feel like we just killed a man."

"We did," said Richard French, seeming less bothered.

"He had it coming," the third man said. "He was a murderer and I knew it from certain signs I saw that night. But I had no way to prove it. We all loved Judy, and I wanted to see him die for what he did."

"You didn't love Harry," French pointed out. "Think of what he'll face now."

"He avenged Judy's murder, which is what he wanted. He's intelligent enough to cover his tracks, and even if he goes to trial he'll get off one way or another," the third man said smugly.

"I want the rest of my money," the electronics man said.

"You'll get it. Don't worry."

As a crowd began to gather around the fallen man, the trio decided to split up. But first French mused aloud, "Wilburforce had a great book collection. I wonder where it goes now."

"To his Uncle Mortimer," said Emil Krantz, "but unfortunately the doctors only give him a few days."

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a distinguished reprint by

MURIEL SPARK

Time *magazine said of Muriel Spark (author of* The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie, The Ballad of Peckham Rye, Memento Mori, *etc.): "This Scotswoman sits composedly among her characters, goading them by silence and an infrequently equivocal smile to disclose their sins." As indeed she does in this story from her 1962 collection published by Lippincott,* Voices at Play.

Dorothy had lifted down a small brown bottle. "I want my eyedrops . . . Are these they?" Joan noted her correct phrase, "Are these they?" and it seemed just over the border of correctness. Perhaps, after all, this brother and sister were strange, vicious, in the wrong . . .

THE DARK GLASSES

by MURIEL SPARK

Coming to the edge of the lake, we paused to look at our reflections in the water. It was then I recognized her from the past, her face looking up from the lake. She had not stopped talking.

I put on my dark glasses to shield my eyes from the sun and conceal my recognition from her eyes.

"Am I boring you?" she said.

"No, not a bit, Dr. Gray."

"Sure?"

It is discouraging to put on sun glasses in the middle of someone's intimate story. But they were necessary, now that I had recognized her, and was excited, and could only honorably hear what she had to say from a point of concealment.

"Must you wear those glasses?"

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"Well, yes. The glare."

"The wearing of dark glasses," she said, "is a modern psychological phenomenon. It signifies the trend towards impersonalization, the weapon of the modern Inquisitor, it—"

"There's a lot in what you say." But I did not remove my glasses, for I had not asked for her company in the first place, and there is a limit to what one can listen to with the naked eye.

We walked round the new concrete verge of the old lake, and she continued the story of how she was led to give up general medical practice and take up psychology; and I looked at her as she spoke through my dark glasses, and because of the softening effect these have upon things I saw her again as I had seen her looking up from the lake, and again as in my childhood.

At the end of the Thirties, Leesden End was an L-shaped town. Our house stood near the top of the L. At the other extreme was the market. Mr. Simmonds, the oculist, had his shop on the horizontal leg, and he lived there above the shop with his mother and sister. All the other shops in the row were attached to each other, but Mr. Simmonds' stood apart, like a real house, with a lane on either side.

I was sent to have my eyes tested. He took me into the darkened interior and said, "Sit down, dear." He put his arm round my shoulder. His forefinger moved up and down on my neck. I was thirteen and didn't like to be rude to him. Dorothy Simmonds, his sister, came downstairs just then; she came upon us silently and dressed in a white overall. Before she had crossed the room to switch on a dim light, Mr. Simmonds removed his arm from my shoulder with such a jerk that I knew for certain he had not placed it there in innocence.

I had seen Miss Simmonds once before, at a garden fête, where she stood on a platform in a big hat and blue dress, and sang "Sometimes between long shadows on the grass," while I picked up windfall apples, all of which seemed to be rotten. Now in her white overall she turned and gave me a hostile look, as if I had been seducing her brother. I felt sexually in the wrong and started looking round the dark room with a wide-eyed air.

"Can you read?" said Mr. Simmonds.

I stopped looking round. I said, "Read what?"—for I had been told I would be asked to read row after row of letters. The card which hung beneath the dim light showed pictures of trains and animals.

"Because if you can't read, we have pictures for illiterates."

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This was Mr. Simmonds' joke. I giggled. His sister smiled and dabbed her right eye with her handkerchief. She had been to London for an operation on her right eye.

I recall reading the letters correctly down to the last few lines, which were too small. I recall Mr. Simmonds squeezing my arm as I left the shop, turning his sandy freckled face in a backward glance to see for certain that his sister was not watching.

My grandmother said, "Did you see—"

"—Mr. Simmonds' sister?" said my aunt.

"Yes, she was there all the time," I said, to make it definite.

My grandmother said, "They say she's going—"

"—blind in one eye," said my aunt.

"And with the mother bedridden upstairs—" my grandmother said.

"—she must be a saint," said my aunt.

Presently—it may have been within a few days or a few weeks—my reading glasses arrived, and I wore them whenever I remembered to do so.

I broke the glasses by sitting on them during my school holidays two years later.

My grandmother said, after she had sighed, "It's time you had your eyes tested—"

"—eyes tested in any case," said my aunt when she had sighed.

I washed my hair the night before and put a wave in it. Next morning at eleven I walked down to Mr. Simmonds' with one of my grandmother's long hatpins in my blazer pocket. The shop front had been done up, with gold lettering on the glass door: Basil Simmonds, Optician, followed by a string of letters which, so far as I remember, were F.B.O.A., A.I.C., and others.

"You're quite the young lady, Joan," he said, looking at my new breasts.

I smiled and put my hand in my blazer pocket.

He was smaller than he had been two years ago. I thought he must be about fifty or thirty. His face was more freckled than ever and his eyes were flat blue as from a box of paints. Miss Simmonds appeared silently in her soft slippers. "You're quite the young lady, Joan," she said from behind her green glasses, for her right eye had now gone blind and the other was said to be troubling her.

We went into the examination room. She glided past me and switched on the dim light above the letter card. I began to read out

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the letters while Basil Simmonds stood with folded hands. Someone came into the front shop. Miss Simmonds slid off to see who it was and her brother tickled my neck. I read on. He drew me towards him. I put my hand into my blazer pocket. He said, "Oh!" and sprang away as the hatpin struck through my blazer and into his thigh.

Miss Simmonds appeared in the doorway in her avenging white overall. Her brother, who had been rubbing his thigh in a puzzled way, pretended to be dusting a mark off the front of his trousers.

"What's wrong? Why did you shout?" she said.

"No, I didn't shout."

She looked at me, then returned to attend to the person in the shop, leaving the intervening door wide open. She was back again almost immediately. My examination was soon over. Mr. Simmonds saw me out at the front door and gave me a pleading unhappy look. I felt like a traitor and I considered him horrible.

For the rest of the holidays I thought of him as "Basil," and by asking questions and taking more interest than usual in the conversation around me I formed an idea of his private life. "Dorothy," I speculated, "and Basil." I let my mind dwell on them until I saw a picture of the rooms above the shop. I hung round at tea-time and, in order to bring the conversation round to Dorothy and Basil, told our visitors I had been to get my eyes tested.

"The mother bedridden all these years and worth a fortune. But what good is it to her?"

"What chance is there for Miss Simmonds now, with that eye?"

"She'll get the money. He will get the bare legal minimum only."

"No, they say he's to get everything. In trust."

"I believe Mrs. Simmonds has left everything to her daughter."

My grandmother said, "She should divide her fortune—"

"—equally between them," said my aunt. "Fair's fair."

I invented for myself a recurrent scene in which brother and sister emerged from their mother's room and, on the narrow landing, allowed their gaze to meet in unspoken combat over their inheritance. Basil's flat-colored eyes did not themselves hold any expression, but by the forward thrust of his red neck he indicated his meaning; Dorothy made herself plain by means of a corkscrew twist of the head—round and up—and the glitter of her one good eye through the green glasses.

I was sent for to try on my new reading glasses. I had the hatpin with me. I was friendly to Basil while I tested the new glasses in the front shop. He seemed to want to put a hand on my shoulder,

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hovered, but was afraid. Dorothy came downstairs and appeared before us just as his hand wavered. He protracted the wavering gesture into one which adjusted the stem of my glasses above my ear.

"Auntie says to try them properly," I said, "while I'm about it." This gave me an opportunity to have a look round the front premises.

"You'll only want them for your studies," Basil said.

"Oh, I sometimes need glasses even when I'm not reading," I said. I was looking through a door into a small inner office, darkened by a tree outside in the lane. The office contained a dumpy green safe, an old typewriter on a table, and a desk in the window with a ledger on it. Other ledgers were placed—

"Nonsense," Dorothy was saying. "A healthy girl like you—you hardly need glasses at all. For reading, to save your eyes, perhaps *yes*. But when you're not reading—"

I said, "Grandmother said to enquire after your mother."

"She's failing," she said.

I took to giving Basil a charming smile when I passed him in the street on the way to the shops. This was very frequently. And on these occasions he would be standing at his shop door awaiting my return; then I would snub him. I wondered how often he was prepared to be won and rejected within the same ten minutes.

I took walks before supper round the back lanes, ambling right round the Simmonds' house, thinking of what was going on inside. One dusky time it started to rain heavily, and I found I could reasonably take shelter under the tree which grew quite close to the grimy window of the inner office. I could just see over the ledge and make out a shape of a person sitting at the desk. Soon, I thought, the shape will have to put on the light.

After five minutes' long waiting time, the shape arose and switched on the light by the door. It was Basil, suddenly looking pink-haired. As he returned to the desk, he stooped and took from the safe a sheaf of papers held in the teeth of a large clip. I knew he was going to select one sheet of paper from the sheaf and that this one document would be the exciting, important one. It was like reading a familiar book: one knew what was coming, but couldn't bear to miss a word.

He did extract one long sheet of paper, and hold it up. It was typewritten with a paragraph in handwriting at the bottom on the side visible from the window. He laid it side by side with another

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sheet of paper which was lying on the desk. I pressed close up to the window, intending to wave and smile if I was seen, and to call out that I was sheltering from the rain which was now coming down in thumps. But he kept his eyes on the two sheets of paper. There were other papers lying about the desk; I could not see what was on them. But I was quite convinced that he had been practicing handwriting on them and that he was in the process of forging his mother's will.

Then he took up the pen. I can still smell the rain and hear it thundering about me, and feel it dripping on my head from the bough overhanging above me. He raised his eyes and looked out at the rain. It seemed his eyes rested on me, at my station between the tree and the window. I kept still and close to the tree like a hunted piece of nature, willing myself to be the color of bark and leaves and rain. Then I realized how much more clearly I could see him than he me, for it was growing dark.

He pulled a sheet of blotting paper towards him. He dipped his pen in the ink and started writing on the bottom of the sheet of paper before him, comparing it from time to time with the one he had taken out of the safe. I was not surprised, but I was thrilled, when the door behind him slowly opened. It was like seeing the film of the book. Dorothy advanced on her creeping feet, and he did not hear but formed the words he was writing, on and on. The rain pelted down regardless. She was looking crookedly, through her green glasses with her one eye, over his shoulder at the paper.

"What are you doing?" she said.

He jumped up and pulled the blotting paper over his work. Her one eye through her green glasses glinted upon him, though I did not actually see it do so but saw only the dark-green glass focused with a squint onto his face.

"I'm making up the accounts," he said, standing with his back to the desk, concealing the papers. I saw his hand reach back and tremble among them.

I shivered in my soaking wet clothes. Dorothy looked with her eye at the window. I slid sideways to avoid her and ran all the way home.

Next morning I said, "I've tried to read with these glasses. It's all a blur. I suppose I'll *have* to take them back?"

"Didn't you notice anything wrong when you tried—"

"—tried them on in the shop?"

"No. But the shop's so dark. *Must* I take them back?"

I took them into Mr. Simmonds early that afternoon.

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"I tried to read with them this morning, but it's all a blur." It was true that I had smeared them with cold cream first.

Dorothy was beside us in no time. She peered one-eyed at the glasses, then at me.

"Are you constipated?" she said.

I maintained silence. But I felt she was seeing everything through her green glasses.

"Put them on," Dorothy said.

"Try them on," said Basil.

They were ganged up together. Everything was going wrong, for I had come here to see how matters stood between them after the affair of the will.

Basil gave me something to read. "It's all right now," I said, "but it was all a blur when I tried to read this morning."

"Better take a dose," Dorothy said.

I wanted to get out of the shop with my glasses as quickly as possible, but the brother said, "I'd better test your eyes again while you're here just to make sure."

He seemed quite normal. I followed him into the dark interior. Dorothy switched on the light. They both seemed normal. The scene in the little office last night began to lose its conviction. As I read out the letters on the card in front of me, I was thinking of Basil as "Mr. Simmonds" and Dorothy as "Miss Simmonds," and feared their authority, and was in the wrong.

"That seems to be all right," Mr. Simmonds said. "But wait a moment." He produced some colored slides with lettering on them.

Miss Simmonds gave me what appeared to be a triumphant one-eyed leer and, as one who washes her hands of a person, started to climb the stairs. Plainly, she knew I had lost my attraction for her brother.

But before she turned the bend in the stairs, she stopped and came down again. She went to a row of shelves and shifted some bottles. I read on. She interrupted:

"My eyedrops, Basil. I made them up this morning. Where are they?"

Mr. Simmonds was suddenly watching her as if something inconceivable was happening.

"Wait, Dorothy. Wait till I've tested the girl's eyes."

She had lifted down a small brown bottle. "I want my eyedrops. I wish you wouldn't displace— Are these they?"

I noted her correct phrase, "Are these they?" and it seemed just

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over the border of correctness. Perhaps, after all, this brother and sister were strange, vicious, in the wrong.

She had raised the bottle and was reading the label with her one good eye. "Yes, this is mine. It has my name on it," she said.

Dark Basil, dark Dorothy.There was something wrong after all. She walked upstairs with her bottle of eyedrops. The brother put his hand on my elbow and heaved me to my feet, forgetting his colored slides.

"There's nothing wrong with your eyes. Off you go." He pushed me into the front shop. His flat eyes were wide open as he handed me my glasses. He pointed to the door. "I'm a busy man," he said.

From upstairs came a long scream. Basil jerked open the door for me, but I did not move. Then Dorothy appeared on the bend of the stairs, screaming, doubled-up, with both hands covering her good eye.

I started screaming when I got home, and was given a sedative. By evening everyone knew that Miss Simmonds had put the wrong drops in her eyes.

"Will she go blind in that eye, too?" people said.

"The doctor says there's hope."

"There will be an enquiry."

"She was going blind in that eye in any case," they said.

"Ah, but the pain—"

"Whose mistake, hers or his?"

"Joan was there at the time. Joan heard the screams. We had to give her a sedative to calm—"

"—calm her down."

"But who made the mistake?"

"She usually makes up the eyedrops herself. She's got a dispenser's—"

"—dispenser's certificate, you know."

"Her name was on the bottle, Joan says."

"Who wrote the name on the bottle? That's the question. They'll find out from the handwriting. If it was Mr. Simmonds, he'll be disqualified."

"She always wrote the names on the bottles. She'll be put off the dispensers' roll, poor thing."

"They'll lose their licence."

"I got eyedrops from them myself only three weeks ago. If I'd have known what I know now, I'd never have—"

"The doctor says they can't find the bottle, it's got lost."

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"No, the sergeant says definitely they've got the bottle. The handwriting is hers. She must have made up the drops herself, poor thing."

"Deadly nightshade, same thing."

"Stuff called atropine. Belladonna. Deadly nightshade."

"It should have been stuff called eserine. That's what she usually had, the doctor says."

"Dr. *Gray* says?"

"Yes, Dr. Gray."

"Dr. Gray says if you switch from eserine to atropine—"

It was put down to an accident. There was a strong hope that Miss Simmonds' one eye would survive. It was she who had made up the prescription. She refused to discuss it.

I said, "The bottle may have been tampered with, have you thought of that?"

"Joan's been reading books."

The last week of my holidays, old Mrs. Simmonds died above the shop and left all her fortune to her daughter. At the same time I got tonsillitis and could not return to school.

I was attended by our woman doctor, the widow of the town's former doctor who had quite recently died. This was the first time I had seen Dr. Gray, although I had known the other Dr. Gray, her husband, whom I missed. The new Dr. Gray was a sharp-faced athletic woman. She was said to be young. She came to visit me every day for a week. After consideration, I decided she was normal and in the right, though dull.

Through the feverish part of my illness, I saw Basil at the desk through the window and I heard Dorothy scream. While I was convalescent, I went for walks and always returned by the lane beside the Simmonds' house. There had been no bickering over the mother's will. Everyone said the eyedrop affair was a terrible accident. Miss Simmonds had retired and was said to be going rather dotty.

I saw Dr. Gray leaving the Simmonds' at six o'clock one evening. She must have been calling on poor Miss Simmonds. She noticed me at once as I emerged from the lane.

"Don't loiter about, Joan. It's getting chilly."

The next evening I saw a light in the office window. I stood under the tree and looked. Dr. Gray sat upon the desk with her back to me, quite close. Mr. Simmonds sat in his chair talking to her, tilting back his chair. A bottle of sherry stood on the table. They each had a glass half filled with sherry. Dr. Gray swung her legs, she was in

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the wrong, sexy, like our morning help who sat on the kitchen table swinging her legs.

But then she spoke. "It will take time," she said. "A very difficult patient, of course."

Basil nodded. Dr. Gray swung her legs, and looked professional. She was in the right, she looked like our games mistress who sometimes sat on a desk swinging her legs.

Before I returned to school, I saw Basil one morning at his shop door. "Reading glasses all right now?" he said.

"Oh, yes, thank you."

"There's nothing wrong with your sight. Don't let your imagination run away with you."

I walked on, certain that he had known my guilty suspicions all along.

"I took up psychology during the war. Up till then I was in general practice."

I had come to the summer school to lecture on history and she on psychology. Psychiatrists are very often ready to talk to strangers about their inmost lives. This is probably because they spend so much time hearing out their patients. I did not recognize Dr. Gray, except as a type, when I had attended her first lecture on "the psychic manifestations of sex." She spoke of child-poltergeists, and I was bored and took refuge in observing the curious language of her profession. I noticed the word "arousement." "Adolescents in a state of sexual arousement," she said, "may become possessed of almost psychic insight."

After lunch, since the Eng. Lit. people had gone off to play tennis, she tacked onto me and we walked to the lake across the lawns, past the rhododendrons. This lake had once been the scene of a love-mad duchess's death.

"—during the war. Before that I was in general practice. It's strange," she said, "how I came to take up psychology. My second husband had a breakdown and was under a psychiatrist. Of course, he's incurable, but I decided . . . It's strange, but that's how I came to take it up. It saved *my* reason. My husband is still in a home. His sister, of course, became quite incurable. *He* has his lucid moments. I did not realize it, of course, when I married, but there was what I'd now call an Oedipus-transference on his part, and—"

How tedious I found these phrases! We had come to the lake. I stooped over it and myself looked back at myself through the dark

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water. I looked at Dr. Gray's reflection and recognized her. I put on my dark glasses, then.

"Am I boring you?" she said.

"No, carry on."

"Must you wear those glasses? . . . it is a modern psychological phenomenon . . . the trend towards impersonalization . . . the modern Inquisitor."

For a while, she watched her own footsteps as we walked round the lake. Then she continued her story. "—an optician. His sister was blind—*going* blind—when I first attended her. Only the one eye was affected. Then there was an accident, one of those *psychological* accidents. She was a trained dispenser, but she mixed herself the wrong eyedrops. Now it's very difficult to make a mistake like that, normally. But subconsciously she wanted to, she *wanted* to. But she wasn't normal, she was not normal."

"I'm not saying she was," I said.

"What did you say?"

"I'm sure she wasn't a normal person," I said, "if you say so."

"It can all be explained psychologically, as we've tried to show to my husband. We've told him and told him, and given him every sort of treatment—shock, insulin, everything. And after all, the stuff didn't have any effect on his sister immediately, and when she did go blind it was caused by acute glaucoma. She would probably have lost her sight in any case. Well, she went off her head completely and accused her brother of having put the wrong drug in the bottle deliberately. This is the interesting part from the psychological point of view—she said she had seen something that he didn't want her to see, something disreputable. She said he wanted to blind the eye that saw it. She said—"

We were walking round the lake for the second time. When we came to the spot where I had seen her face reflected, I stopped and looked over the water.

"I'm boring you."

"No, no."

"I wish you would take off those glasses."

I took them off for a moment. I rather liked her for her innocence in not recognizing me, though she looked hard and said, "There's a subconscious reason why you wear them."

"Dark glasses hide dark thoughts," I said.

"Is that a saying?"

"Not that I've heard. But it is one now."

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She looked at me anew. But she didn't recognize me. These fishers of the mind have no eye for outward things. Instead, she was "recognizing" my mind: I daresay I came under some category of hers.

I had my glasses on again, and was walking on.

"How did your husband react to his sister's accusations?" I said.

"He was remarkably kind."

"Kind?"

"Oh, yes, in the circumstances. Because she started up a lot of gossip in the neighborhood. It was only a small town. It was a long time before I could persuade him to send her to a home for the blind where she could be looked after. There was a terrible bond between them. Unconscious incest."

"Didn't you know that when you married him? I should have thought it would have been obvious."

She looked at me again. "I had not studied psychology at that time," she said.

I thought, neither had I.

We were silent for the third turn about the lake. Then she said, "Well, I was telling you how I came to study psychology and practice it. My husband had this breakdown after his sister went away. He had delusions. He kept imagining he saw eyes looking at him everywhere. He still sees them from time to time. But *eyes*, you see. That's significant. Unconsciously, he felt he had blinded his sister. Because unconsciously he wanted to do so. He keeps confessing that he did so."

"And attempted to forge the will?" I said.

She stopped. "What are you saying?"

"Does he admit that he tried to forge his mother's will?"

"I haven't mentioned anything about a will."

"Oh, I thought you had."

"But, in fact, that was his sister's accusation. What made you say that? How did you know?"

"I must be psychic," I said.

She took my arm. I had become a most endearing case history.

"You must be psychic indeed," she said. "You must tell me more about yourself. Well, that's the story of my taking up my present profession. When my husband started having these delusions and making these confessions, I felt I had to understand the workings of the mind. And I began to study them. It has been fruitful. It has saved my own reason."

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"Did it ever occur to you that the sister's story might be true?" I said. "Especially as he admits it."

She took away her arm and said, "Yes, I considered the possibility. I must admit I considered it well."

She saw me watching her face. She looked as if she were pleading some personal excuse.

"Oh do," she said, "please take off those glasses."

"Why don't you believe his own confession?"

"I'm a psychiatrist and we seldom believe confessions." She looked at her watch as if to suggest I had started the whole conversation and was boring her.

I said, "He might have stopped seeing eyes if you'd taken him at his word."

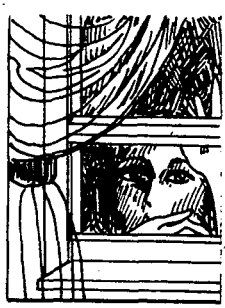
She shouted, "What are you saying? What are you thinking of? He wanted to give a statement to the police. Do you realize—"

"You know he's guilty," I said.

"As his wife," she said, "I know he's guilty. But as a psychiatrist, I must regard him as innocent. That's why I took up the subject." She suddenly turned angry and shouted, "You damned inquisitor, I've met your type before."

I could hardly believe she was shouting, who previously had been so calm. "Oh, it's not my business," I said, and took off my glasses to show willing.

I think it was then she recognized me.



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a *NEW* short story by

JOSEPH HANSEN

"The Tango Bear" will be included in a new collection of stories by Joseph Hansen, Brandstetter and Others, *about to be published by The Countryman Press. A gripping, beautifully detailed story about a stunning part of the country and some people who inhabit it.*

"I have never written about Bohannon before," Joseph Hansen told us, "though he has been in my mind for several years now. I have two or three more stories in rough outline involving him, his friends Stubbs and Rivera and the rest, and his boarding stables." Wonderful news, we know you will agree, after reading "The Tango Bear" . . .

THE TANGO BEAR

by JOSEPH HANSEN

Stubbs used to do the cooking, but it had pained Hack Bohannon to watch him. Stubbs had been a rodeo rider in his time. Young, being sent flying from the backs of sunfishing broncos hadn't stopped him. Tramplings and tossings by brahma bulls were all in a dusty day's work—or play. But he had broken a lot of bones, some of them more than once. And time is on no man's side. By forty, he was no longer fit for the rodeo circuit. And he had left forty far behind him when he came to look after Bohannon's stables up Rodd Canyon, above Madrone. He could still ride like part of the horse, if he could get into the saddle. But walking was another matter. After a few months, Bohannon had taken over the cooking.

He didn't mind. It was a way to get the day started. It gave point to getting out of bed. More than a year ago now, Linda was taken

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hostage on a rotten tub of a fishing boat full of brown Mexican heroin, beaten, raped, half drowned, and broken in her mind so that she no longer knew him or anyone else. At the time, Bohannon had loaded the Winchester to shoot himself. But he couldn't do it. If your stupidity brought harm to someone you loved, you lived with that. He went to bed sober, though he knew his dreams would likely be terrible. And he rose in the morning, though he knew the day would be little better. Having to cook helped.

A lean, dark man, shaggy-haired, an inch over six feet, and lately turned forty himself, he stood at a window of the pine plank kitchen, smoking, gazing out at the morning. The air that came in at the window was fresh, but the sky had a yellow tinge to it above the canyon trees and brush, which meant the day would be hot. And dry. When the hell was it going to rain? California canyons had a way of burning out. That was commoner down south. Here on the central coast, rains drifted in off the sea and regularly damped things down. In sheltered coves of these mountains, moss hung from the oaks. But this year rain was scarce. Bohannon dreaded a fire. He stabled a lot of horses—other peoples' horses, but he cared about them all, beautiful, ugly, gentle, mean. Big as they were, they were helpless. And horses were fools in fire.

The kettle shrieked and he crossed from the window to pour boiling water into a big blue-enamel coffee pot. He filled the kettle, set it back on the burner, and was folding biscuit dough, gazing up at one of Stubbs's horse drawings on the wall, when the old man's worn boot-heels thumped the plank walkway that fronted the ranch house. The door banged open. Stubbs was in a shaving phase. Damp made his knuckles hurt, and in rain and fog he let his white whiskers sprout. But this morning his jowls were smooth and pink. His eyes were a blue that must have wowed the girls in the old days. Now they were round with surprise and worry.

"You better come with me," he said.

"Don't tell me it's Lewis's colt again." Bohannon sighed and rinsed the sticky dough off his hands. "I ought to charge them double for the nuisance." He pulled a shirt from a chair-back and flapped into it. "What's he done this time?"

"It's no colt," Stubbs said. "It's a filly. She's pretty bunged up, too. Don't know how she got here, condition she's in." He hobbled away. Bohannon followed. "I never heard her. Rivera ought to heard her, but you know him. He sleeps the sleep of the blessed."

"What are you talking about?" Bohannon said.

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"There's a girl in the empty box stall," Stubbs said.

There was. She lay asleep on fresh straw. Slender, young, about twenty, in jeans, blouse, fake-suede zipper boots, floppy jacket—the kind of outfit girls at Madrone College wore. The clothes were torn and soiled. The girl's long soft dark hair had twigs and dry leaves tangled in it. Bohannon didn't like the way she was sleeping. He knelt and felt for a pulse. It was there, strong and regular. He saw blood on her other sleeve. He touched that sleeve and she gave a cry, opened her eyes, and cringed away from him.

"It's all right," he said. "We won't hurt you."

"Oh, God," she said, and pushed hair off her face. "I wanted to be gone by sunrise. I just couldn't walk any farther. I had to sleep." She tried to get to her feet, but the effort made her gasp. She went white and dropped to her knees. She put her good hand against the rough plank wall, planted a foot, and tried to rise again. "I'll go on now. I'm sorry for trespassing." The arm in the bloody sleeve hung limp. She managed a brief smile. "Could you"—her eyes begged—"just not tell anybody I was here?"

"You're hurt bad," Stubbs said. "Who done it to you?"

"I had an accident," she said. "Drove off the road."

He doubted it, but Bohannon was grateful for every word she spoke. When he'd found Linda this way, torn, bruised, bloody, aboard that filthy boat, she wouldn't speak a word. She would never speak again. She had gone to hide inside herself forever. "There's a phone in the house," he said. "We can call the sheriff. Here, let me help you."

"No. Please, not the sheriff."

"Come on." Bohannon reached for her. But she twisted half away and his hand struck the dangling arm. She gave a sharp cry, fell face forward in the straw, and lay still.

"Fainted," Stubbs said. "That arm looks broke."

Bohannon picked her up and carried her into the house.

Belle Hesseltine said, "I think you're making a mistake." She shut the hall door behind her, set her medical kit on a chair beside that door, and came to the long deal table where Stubbs, Rivera, and Bohannon were eating. Bohannon, mouth full, nodded, reached, dragged out a chair for her to sit on. She said, "You're borrowing trouble again. When are you going to learn?"

Bohannon swallowed and said, "Sit down. Try the eggs. They've got tomatoes and jalapenos in them. Those are sourdough biscuits.

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Hecho a mano. From scratch." With a smiling shake of her head for Bohannon's willfulness, the doctor sat. Bohannon said, "You know Stubbs. Rivera?"

Rivera was young, fragile-looking, a seminarian aiming at the priesthood. But he worked hard, was good with the horses, and stronger than he looked. He gave the doctor a shy smile. Women frightened him. Stubbs ducked his head. "Ma'am," he said. Doctors frightened him.

"She's terrified," Belle Hesseltine told Bohannon. "She's in some kind of trouble, and it's far more serious than a few bruises and contusions." She flapped open a napkin and laid it in her lap. "Even than a broken arm."

"You don't know her? Never saw her before?"

"There are fifteen hundred students on that campus." Belle Hesseltine spooned eggs onto her plate, speared sausage links, took a biscuit from the basket. "And most of them are healthy the year around. No, I don't know her."

"No identification on her," Stubbs said. "Maybe she ain't a student. Maybe she don't come from around here."

"That jacket was bought at a shop in Madrone," Bohannon said. "It's on the label. The boots are from San Luis. She's from around here someplace." He gulped the last of his coffee, laid the napkin beside his plate, pushed back his chair. "She claims she drove off the road. If I find the car, it could tell me who she is." He got to his feet.

"She's lying about that," Belle Hesseltine said. "There is no car. Her injuries aren't that kind. I've treated a great many scrapes and bangs like hers. Those are hikers' injuries. She got those in a long, rough fall."

"People don't hike in the dark," Bohannon said.

"If it was only an accident"—Stubbs tilted back his chair and made a ragged cigarette—"what's she so scared of? Won't tell us her name. Don't want us to find her folks. We mustn't call the law. Didn't even want us to call you. Just says, let her hide here till she's better. I guess she didn't fall. I guess somebody pushed her."

"I guess so," Bohannon said. "I want to know why. Before she gets better. I want to know who."

"Be careful, Hack," Belle Hesseltine said. "She seems a lovely, well bred girl, but appearances can be so deceiving. You don't know what she's into, and who's in it with her. Drugs, prostitution? Let the sheriff handle it."

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Bohannon's laugh was sour. "If I hadn't let the sheriff in on that Mexican heroin smuggling case, Linda might still be here." He bent and kissed the doctor's soft old cheek. "Thanks for the house-call, Belle. And for keeping quiet about it."

"It's against my better judgment," she said strictly.

"I'll poke around, see what I can find." Bohannon went to the outer door. "I'll backtrack from the stables."

"It shouldn't take you long." The doctor rose abruptly from the table, making a face. Stubbs had lighted his cigarette. She waved away the smoke with a hand. "One of her ankles is badly sprained. She can't have come far." She gave Stubbs a severe look. "You're old enough to have better sense. Tobacco will kill you."

"I've been run over by a herd of buffalo," Stubbs said. "If that didn't kill me, I can stand a little smoke."

Bohannon went out into the bright sunlight.

She had come from farther than anyone with a sprained ankle should have been able to. Fear could sometimes mask out pain. He was winded and wet with sweat by the time he had climbed out of a ravine of big old oaks to this ragged blacktop road. Gazing around at the brown slopes and ridges, he did some mental mapwork. After rolling and ricocheting down this hundred-foot drop, she'd blundered through the dark a good five miles. The drop here was steep. He'd had to haul himself up by grabbing chaparral and rock—his clothes were torn now like hers, his hands bleeding the same way.

He stood, panting, looking up and down the road. A few yards along, black streaks of fresh rubber lay on the pitted asphalt that sun and rain had bleached to grey. Somebody had stopped a car there. He walked down for a closer look. That car had been going far too fast for such a twisting road. It had also stopped too fast, skidded a long way, swerving wildly, damn near out of control. He gauged it was a big car, heavy, the tires new.

In the morning stillness, the sound reached him now of another car coming. He stepped onto the road shoulder. The car came around a bluff where a gnarled pine leaned out above the road. The car was taking its time. It wasn't a car he recognized—beige, two–three years old, compact, anonymous. He didn't recognize the driver, either. Ranch hat with a curled-up brim, little neckerchief, open collar, whipcord jacket, everything tan. Bohannon gave him a neighborly nod and lift of the hand. The man drove past. If he saw Bohannon, it was from behind wrap-around sunglasses. He probably didn't see

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Bohannon. He was looking at the landscape. The landscape here was worth looking at.

Bohannon stepped into the road and crouched. Between last night's skidmarks, where they ended, lay a spot of oil. Fresh, no dust on it. He chewed his lower lip. Funny. The car must have stood here for a time. What the hell for? He straightened, knees giving small cracks that said he was too old for this, and walked back along the road. Dry brush edged the blacktop, knee-high. Many yards back, just about even with the place where the tire tracks began, right at the spot where Bohannon judged the girl had tumbled into the ravine, the brush was smashed flat. He knelt and examined it. A swatch of calico caught his eye—the fabric of the girl's shirt. He unsnagged it and pushed it into a pocket with the other bits he'd found along her trail—a drawstring from her jacket, a decorative bootstrap.

Out of the pocket he drew a V-shaped rag of tweed. He blinked at it in his fingers. He lifted his eyes and looked back along the road to where the car had stopped and unaccountably waited. The girl had worn no tweed, but Bohannon had found this caught on a fallen oak branch down below. So, had the driver of the car worn tweed, left the car, clambered down after her? It looked like it. Why? Had he tried to kill her by pushing her out of the car as it tore along through the night? Had he left the car and followed to make sure she was really dead? Or had she jumped from the car and had he followed to fetch her back? He'd failed. Her fear had outrun his purpose, whatever it was. Bohannon frowned at the scrap, fingered it. Good tweed, hand-loomed. Expensive. He gave his head a shake, pushed the bit of wool back into his pocket, and headed for home, wishing for a horse.

When he got back to the place, kids on horses came swaying out the gate, saddle leather creaking. Stubbs helped two small children ride slowly around the paddock. A young couple from Los Osos wanted boarding and exercise rates—they were leaving on a cruise. In the shadows of the stable, Rivera helped the blacksmith from over in Paso Robles. It seemed an ordinary day. As Bohannon showered, he saw out the bathroom window horses grazing the long pastures that sloped up to the sunburned mountains, horses standing sleepily together in the shadows of oaks. A peaceful scene. What was a frightened girl doing in the middle of it?

While he heated soup for her, he built her a thick beef and cheese

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sandwich, and poured a glass of milk. Carrying bowl, sandwich, milk on a tray, he rapped the door of the room where they'd put her. She made a sleepy sound that he took to be permission to enter. She moved drowsily under a patchwork quilt on an old pine poster bed. Blinking, trying to smile, pushing hair off her face, which was badly scraped down one side, she sat up. The broken arm was in a neat sling. Bohannon set the tray on the bedside table and arranged pillows for her so she could manage the tray on her lap.

"I'll repay you for all this," she said solemnly.

"All right." He dragged a chair to the bedside, sat down, put his hands on his knees, and told her what he had done with his morning. "After you jumped out of the car, he stopped it and tried to follow you. It was too dark and he gave up. But only for the time being—right?"

She ate with the hunger of the healthy young, spooning up the thick homemade soup. She gave him a quick glance. "This is good. Thank you. I was starving. But I won't stay and eat you out of house and home. I'll be on my way now."

"Not on that ankle. On your way where?"

"It's not your worry." She took a big bite of the sandwich, chewed a while, washed the bite down with a long gulp of milk. "Someplace far away."

"You didn't bring any money," he said.

"I'll be all right. You've done all you could." She finished off the soup. "Lucky for me I stumbled on your place. There aren't that many kind people left in the world."

"That sounds grownup," Bohannon said, "but not calling the law when someone's trying to kill you—that doesn't."

"Kill me?" She opened her eyes wide, mocking him.

"Rape you then," Bohannon said.

She stared. Color crept into her face. "What?" Her laugh was brief and sad. "Rape? Oh, no." She frowned. "You ask questions like a policeman." She looked out the window. "But you're not. You're a rancher. Horses."

"I was a deputy sheriff for fourteen years," he said. "Just about long enough to learn that people only jump from speeding vehicles for very serious reasons."

She bit her lip to keep from smiling. Her eyes never smiled. "He won't find me here."

"He knows the kind of fall you had, knows you had to be hurt and couldn't go far. There's a seminary over that ridge." He lifted an

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arm to point. "There's Ludlow's apple ranch down Sills Canyon. And there's here. Not many places to have to search. And he's searching, isn't he?"

"I said I'd go." She glared at him, picked up the tray, pushed it into his hands. "Thank you for the meal. And for the doctor. And the wash and the sleep. But I don't want to put you in any danger." She flung back the bedclothes. Belle had put her into an old pair of his pajamas, cuffs rolled up on the pants and one sleeve, the other sleeve hanging because of the sling. She swung her legs over the bedside and tried to stand. "Oh, wow," she whispered, going white and sitting down hard.

"I'm not in any danger." Bohannon set the tray on the floor and helped her lie back against the pillows again. He pulled the quilt up over her. "But you are. Tell me his name and what this is all about. I can help you."

She lay with her eyes shut. She shook her head. "No. That's where you're wrong. You're sweet, but you're wrong." She opened her eyes. She was very earnest. "There are things that happen to us that no one can help us with. It's a big world, with billions of people in it, but some of them are all alone, and always will be." She closed her eyes again and two tears ran down her face.

"I don't understand," Bohannon said. "The man terrifies you, yet you're protecting him."

"You do understand," she said, and was asleep.

Bohannon picked up the tray and softly left the room.

What kind of magazines would she like? The rack in the cool arcade of boutiques off the sunny main street in San Luis appeared to have every kind there was. She didn't seem to him the *Good Housekeeping* sort. He chose *The New Yorker, Los Angeles*, and one called *Ms.* Television reception was bad at his place because of the surrounding mountains and cable hadn't come in yet. Reading would help her pass the time.

Magazines under his arm, he went along the shadowy corridor to a lively high-countered place that made fancy sandwiches and had Anchor steam beer on draft. It was great beer. He carried a tall cold glass of it out into the sunshine and sat by a rocky stream there to drink it among noisy college youngsters. He smoked cigarettes and let time slide because he hated going to the sheriff's station.

But after a second beer, he made himself go. A good many men in sand-color uniforms spoke his name in the halls, and he spoke

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theirs. But he felt more out of place here now than any stranger. He ended up in an office that had once been his—before he had resigned over the whitewash of an officer who in cold blood had shot down an unarmed latino kid. Gerard sat at a desk still piled with too much work for one man to handle.

Gerard didn't smile at Bohannon, and Bohannon would never in his life again smile at Gerard. But Gerard got Bohannon the missing-person file without comment, without question. He knew better than to ask Bohannon to sit down, and Bohannon remained standing to leaf through the file. People kept wandering off, but none of them on any of these sheets remotely resembled the sad, frightened girl in his spare bedroom. He handed the file back with thanks and walked out of the station as quickly as he could. To him, it smelled of death.

The attendance office of the sprawling new Madrone Community College smelled only of fresh paint. But the woman in charge simply smiled disbelief when Bohannon asked about absent female students and passed over the counter to her a drawing of the girl he'd had Stubbs make from memory. Stubbs was best at horses, but he could draw a good human likeness when he put his mind to it and his knuckles didn't hurt too much. The woman set reading glasses on her beaky nose, examined the drawing, handed it back. She pulled the glasses down and looked at him over them. "I'm sorry. She might be almost anyone." Bohannon had to agree. Crossing the campus to get here, he had passed at least a dozen.

He drove north from the college toward the town, a clutch of spindly Victorian frame houses on sleepy, narrow streets. Behind it, livestock grazed foothills. Farther back, the mountains rose. To the west, hills forested by tall pines blocked out sight of the ocean, scarcely a mile away. The town was trying to wake up. Fresh paint had been laid on the jigsaw work and turrets of the old houses—wedding-cake tints. On the main street, shopfronts had been rusticated with planks to look like a set decorator's notion of the Olde West. He didn't care for that. Tourists were supposed to. So far, not many had—dogs still slept in the middle of Main Street. Bohannon came here only for the shop that sold coffee beans.

Outside town, in a meadow with a little stand of pines at the lower end, where rumor had it a new shopping center was going to be built someday soon, he was surprised to find tents pitched, a ferris wheel and other shiny rides set up, a faded canvas midway with games of chance and hot-dog stands—a traveling carnival. Metallic music

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reached him in the pickup as he passed. He saw loudspeaker horns on tall barber-striped poles that held strings of lightbulbs and plastic pennons, red, blue, yellow, green, that fluttered in the wind. He shook his head. He couldn't recall a carnival ever stopping in Madrone before. He drove on to the coffee-bean place.

The sun was setting behind his own hills when he got back to the stables and ranch house in Rodd Canyon, braked the pickup in a swirl of dust, and climbed down out of it with the magazines and sacks of coffee beans. He slammed the tinny cab door and made for the kitchen, where Stubbs was at the stove, pushing food around in a big skillet. The old man had a clock in his head. Things had to happen on time. It was good for the business—horses thought the same way. Supper time was supper time. Bohannon set down his burden and went to the stove for a look. Stubbs glanced at him. "Turkey hash. All right with you?"

"Smells good," Bohannon said.

"You know a fella named Williams?" Stubbs asked.

"No. What about him?" Bohannon found a tumbler in a cupboard, ice cubes in a lumbering old refrigerator. "Did he come here? What for?"

"Said he'd like to buy your spread." Stubbs salted the hash from a big tin shaker. "He looked the stables over, nail by nail. Squinted into every corner. Not too easy for him, either. Walks with them aluminum crutches that clamp around your arms? Short legs, all bent out of shape. Worse off than me."

Bohannon took the glass of ice and a bottle of Old Crow to the table. The table was neatly set. As always when Stubbs cooked, a big jug of ketchup stood in the middle. Bohannon sat down and poured himself a drink. "It's not for sale. Why did you let him waste his time?"

"He don't know the meaning of 'not for sale.' "

Bohannon tasted the whiskey and lit a cigarette. "You been keeping an eye on the girl? Did you ask her if she likes turkey hash?"

"She's mostly been asleep," Stubbs said. "Them painkillers do that to you. Found her once, trying to get to the bathroom. That's a mighty tender ankle. I expect she's sore pretty much all over. Way I remember it. Be worse tomorrow. Poor little thing. I carried her to and fro."

"Keep that up," Bohannon said, "and you'll be down in bed yourself."

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"Williams wanted to look through the house," Stubbs said. "I told him he'd have to ask you. Acted like he didn't hear. Headed straight for it, hauled himself up on the porch, started peeking in the windows."

"It was a beige compact, right?" Bohannon said. "He wore wraparound sunglasses, a little neckerchief, cowboy hat with the brim crimped up on the sides?"

"You do know him," Stubbs said.

"He doesn't want to buy this place," Bohannon said. "He's looking for the girl. I saw him this morning."

"I run him off." Stubbs limped to the kitchen door, pushed open the screen, leaned out, and whistled for Rivera. He let the screen fall shut and frowned at Bohannon. "You think he's the one that tried to kill her?"

"And so do you," Bohannon said. "You didn't say anything to her about him, I hope."

Stubbs shook his head. "I'm smarter than I look. I figured she'd try to run away, and she ain't ready for that." He rattled plates down out of a cupboard. "I thought you said it was a heavy car."

"A man can change cars." Bohannon worked on his drink. "Did you get the license number?"

"Covered with mud," Stubbs said. "Neat. Like it was laid on with a paintbrush. And I don't see like I used to."

"Probably a rental car," Bohannon said, "and if we checked, it wouldn't be any Williams anybody ever knew."

Rivera came in with his hair slicked down by water.

Bohannon awoke in pitch darkness. That was wrong. Ground lights glowed outside all night. Up in the meadows, horses were running hard, nickering, afraid. In the stables, horses snorted fear, hoofs kicked walls. Bohannon left the bed so fast he fell. He groped for the Winchester by the dresser where it always stood. But tonight Rivera had it. Bohannon had posted him on a kitchen chair on the porch outside the girl's room to guard her. Bohannon poked into a shirt, yanked on pants, leaned out the window. "Rivera?" He couldn't see. He tried the lightswitch. No light. A power outage? They were common enough in storms, but tonight was calm and clear. "Rivera?" Bohannon climbed out the window onto the porch. He could hear Stubbs cussing out the horses in the stables. Bohannon didn't head that way. He ran along the planks to the girl's room. The chair was

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there—he stumbled over it. But the man he fell against was not Rivera. This was a thick man with a bad smell to him.

"What's the matter?" It was the girl's voice, thin.

"Stay down!" Bohannon shouted. The man struggled. Bohannon got a knee in the mouth. He tried for a better grip, and the man twisted away from him. Bohannon, on hands and knees, saw the man above him, silhouetted against faint starlight. The man raised the rifle and swung it down. Bohannon ducked, but the stock struck his shoulder and he heard bone crack. He lay on his face and for a moment knew only pain, no sight, no sound, no thought. Then he heard the man running away. Groaning, Bohannon struggled to his feet. He clutched a porch post. "Catch him, Rivera!" he shouted. "Catch him, Stubbs!" He reeled off the porch and tried to run.

The girl called from the window. "What is it?"

"Horse thief!" Bohannon lied. "Happens all the time!"

The motor of a large vehicle thrashed to life out in the road. Headlights went on out there. Gears clashed, a hulking, dark shape lurched down the trail. Shaggy eucalyptus trees edged the property there. He couldn't see well, but damned if the thing didn't look like a horse van. He opened his mouth to shout at it, but no sound came. He collapsed in the dust.

He awoke in his bed with his arm bound tight across his ribs and sun pouring in the window. Stubbs stood beside the bed with a tray of food. He grinned. "Belle Hesseltine says if you mixed that shot she give you with whiskey you'd sleep forever." Bohannon numbly blinked and yawned. The memory came back vaguely of gaunt, grim Belle, by the soft light of a kerosene lamp, setting his collarbone at three in the morning, and saying sternly, "I told you so, and I'm not ashamed to say it. Now you put that girl in the sheriff's hands. That man could have shot you dead."

Bohannon said, "He didn't come to shoot."

"Can you sit up?" Stubbs said. "You want help?"

Bohannon shook his head, pushed himself into position with his right arm. "What time is it?"

"Noon." Stubbs set the tray on Bohannon's knees. "Been all quiet and regular so far." He sat down. "Them's poached eggs. Invalid food."

"Did the girl believe me about the horse thief?"

"I looked in twice. All she does is sleep."

"Good." Bohannon ate for a moment in silence, frowning. He

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blinked at Stubbs. "What upset the horses? They don't pay any attention to the lights going out."

"Not as a rule," Stubbs said. "Power company come and fixed the line an hour ago. Cut, all right. Deliberate."

"He meant to take the girl," Bohannon said.

"So it was smart to stir up the horses," Stubbs said. "Rivera run off to see what was bothering them. He's ashamed of himself, feels like he let you down bad. Specially about the rifle—leaving the rifle behind for that bastard."

Bohannon made to shrug and felt pain. "Rivera didn't want the rifle from the start. Priests don't shoot people. It was natural for him to forget it."

"I didn't take the horses acting up for what it was." Stubbs shook his head sadly. "A diversion. If I'd of had my wits about me, I'd have come direct to help the girl."

"You did right." Bohannon drank coffee. Stubbs had ground some of the new beans. The coffee was fine. "But I still don't know what got into them." He pointed. "You want to light me a cigarette, please? They're in my shirt."

Stubbs got cigarette pack and matches from the shirt, lit a cigarette and gave it to Bohannon, wrinkled his nose, turned back, picked up the shirt, and smelled it. "Well, I'll be," he said mildly. "Bear." He dropped the shirt.

Bohannon stared at him through smoke. "Bear?"

"That's what scared the horses," Stubbs said. "Never thought I'd get a whiff of bear again. Last time was in Wyoming, nineteen and twenty-eight. I was working cattle for a fella by the name of—"

"It was on his clothes," Bohannon said. "Rank. I remember wondering how any man could smell like that."

"Beats me," Stubbs said. "You and me smell like horse a lot of the time, but we live with horses. Nobody lives with a bear."

"The carnival," Bohannon said.

But he didn't go there. Dressed, a little stupefied by the drug Belle had shot him full of but able to navigate on his feet and ready to drive the pickup, he was halfway to it, jingling the keys, when he remembered what Stubbs had said about the girl. He went back inside, rapped her door, waited, opened the door. A shape was under the patchwork quilt, all right. But it wasn't her shape. He knew it before he threw the quilt back. She had laid pillows underneath.

Her boots had stood on the shiny broad floorboards beside the

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chest of drawers. They were gone. Stubbs had washed her clothes and laid them in a drawer. He pulled the drawer open. Nothing. He left the room, wondering how much of a head start she had on him. Only one answer made sense. She had left as soon as she could after the man had left—the man who smelled like a bear. She had fled in panic. He couldn't blame her. But chancy as his protection had proved, she was worse off on her own. He had to bring her back.

He chose a grey gelding called Seashell. He wouldn't shy at a clumsy mounting, and he was sure-footed, and Bohannon believed the girl would keep away from roads and not seek a place full of people this time. He'd have to look for her where there weren't always trails. Watching Rivera saddle the grey, Bohannon disliked himself for wishing the girl pain. But he hoped that ankle was making travel slow for her. He hoped Stubbs's memory of how her kind of bruises felt two days afterward was right. Rivera held Seashell's head while Bohannon used a child's mounting block to crawl awkwardly into the saddle.

"Don't get down," Rivera said. "You can't get back up."

Bohannon found her trail nearby, but soon lost it. He crossed and recrossed ridges, firebreaks, circled clumps of oak, waded through chaparral, traced barrancas, most of them dry, one with a little trickle of a creek rambling down it. And here was a place where she had stopped to rest. She had knelt to drink from the creek. Her limp showed plainly in the indentations of her boots in the sand here. But she had left the sand before long. Lunging, Seashell got Bohannon up out of the barranca.

The sun was going down. He was in Sills Canyon and ready to give up. It was too far. He had missed her somehow back along the track. He was weary from the saddle and the ache in his shoulder was strong. He wanted a drink, a hot bath, a meal, and sleep. He reined the patient grey around and headed homeward by a trail he hadn't taken. After a mile or two, he sighted the burnt-out cabin. The chimney stood, three walls, a section of roof. Burnt out so long ago he couldn't recollect when. He eased Seashell down there. And before he reached the yard, he heard her weeping. Brush crackling under the horse's hoofs, Bohannon walked him close and looked inside. She was huddled on the hearth.

"Aren't you hungry?" he said. "You didn't bring food."

She nodded mutely, wiping her nose on her jacket sleeve like a little kid. Sobs still jerked her when she pushed up off the hearth

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and came forlornly hopping through the trash, bottles, cans on the floor. She held onto a charred upright and gazed at him. He slid down from the horse—it was almost a fall. He held out the reins to her.

"I never rode a horse," she said.

"I'll lead him then," Bohannon said. "You just sit in the saddle. Come on, I'll help you up."

"I can't sleep in that room again," she said.

"They won't be back," he said. "I'm going after them."

She stared. "You don't know who they are."

"I know who one is," he said. "That's a start."

"I didn't tell you," she said. "Please remember that."

The dusty bulbs strung on frayed and sagging wires from the striped poles lit the tent-tops now and made of the carnival an island of hectic brightness in the night. The fast rides whirled, their gaudy red, blue, gold metal pods gleaming and glinting, children hanging on white-knuckled, trailing shrieks of joy and terror. The ferris wheel rose sedate against the stars, the wheel strung with tiny lights that were like stars themselves, the seats swinging grandmotherly as rocking chairs. The faces of the riders were pale ovals in the fairy-tale glow.

Bohannon climbed stiffly down from the pickup onto the trampled grass of the meadow, among disorderly rows of newer pickups, campers, and family cars, and heard the wheeze of an orgatron, the thin clash of its cymbals, the rattle of its snare drum. Walking past the noisy, hulking generator trucks, he smiled when he sighted a miniature merry-go-round, all carved and gilded and aglitter with mirrors, the small horses all curly manes and tails and flared nostrils, rising and sinking on their shiny poles, carrying cowboys three, four, five years old, wide-eyed with wonder.

The midway was crowded with high-school and college youngsters, loud and rollicking, munching tacos and hot dogs, guzzling soft drinks from cans. Some of them tried hard to look superior and bored—a carnival was corny, after all, strictly hicktown—but Bohannon judged most of them had never had a crack at one before and would remember it forever, no matter what they pretended. The canvas caves of yellow light that held the baseball throws, the rifle shoots, the wheel of fortune were doing business just as brisk as the one where a battery of new electronic games beeped and twittered.

At the end of the midway—it wasn't a long walk—the circular

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show-tent loomed up behind a limp façade of weathered canvas posters. The smell of animals was strong here on the cool night air, the smells of tanbark and crackerjack. Bohannon looked at the crackled paintings of llamas, zebras, seals. Trick dogs wore tiny clown hats and tutus. Young men in white hung upside down from trapezes. A pretty young lady walked a tightwire. Two young blacks on tall unicycles played basketball. And here was what he had come for. THE TANGO BEAR. The sign painter had made the bear about ten feet tall and snarling. *See him dance. See him rollerskate. See him ride a motorcycle.*

The window of the truck from which tickets were sold was closed. Bohannon knocked on it. No one opened it. He made his way around to the back of the tent. A good many of what you might mistake for horse vans stood here in the near darkness. Their doors hung open. The animals were behind the canvas at his back. He could hear them shift and breathe and munch. A hoof clattered a bucket. Bohannon dropped to his knees and lifted the tent flap to peer inside. He wasn't looking for hoofs, flippers, paws. He hoped to see human feet. And he did—in manure-crusted work shoes.

A freckled, red-haired girl in dirty jeans and a flannel shirt too big for her, the tails almost to her knees, looked down at him. "Aren't you a little old for sneaking in?" She had the voice of a very tough small boy. "Buy a ticket."

"Nobody will sell me one." Bohannon worked himself under the canvas, gripped a pole, pulled himself to his feet. A fat zebra kicked backward at him. He jumped aside. "Where do I find the Tango Bear?"

"Last sighted parked up by Hearst Beach," she said. "He missed both daytime shows. If he doesn't get back here"—she glanced at a wristwatch—"in twenty-five minutes, Mr. Cathcart will probably kill him. Not the bear. Pancho, I mean. What is it about Pancho?" The girl regarded Bohannon's bad arm. "Only handicapped people want to see him."

"You mean Williams? Aluminum crutches?"

"That's the one." A taffy-colored llama nosed the girl's butt. She gave its muzzle a slap. "Gertrude, I told you, no more carrots." But Gertrude was not taking no for an answer and the girl moved her pockets out of the llama's reach. "Williams scares Pancho. Are you going to scare him, too?"

"He borrowed something of mine last night," Bohannon said. "I'd like to have it back. I'll be around for a while. Don't tell him I'm

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looking for him." He offered her a twenty-dollar bill. She shook her head. He put the money away. "I want it to be a surprise," he said.

"Williams is coming tonight," she said. "That's why I told Mr. Cathcart not to worry about Pancho turning up for the evening show. Pancho won't cross Williams."

"You're a psychologist," Bohannon said.

She shrugged. "I live with animals." She reached into the loose shirt and brought out a tiny monkey. It scampered up her arm to perch on her shoulder, lean against her ear, peer anxiously at Bohannon, and squeak. The girl said, "After a while, you figure them out, and people are no different."

The fat zebra kicked at Bohannon again.

"Except meaner," the girl said.

Bohannon sat on the grass with his back against the vibrating wheel of one of the mobile generators. He was in shadow, and he could watch the highway from here. Laughter and shouts came from the midway.The merry-go-round music wheezed. Cars and pickups and RVs arrived and departed from the parking area. He watched for the beige compact. Maybe a large car, too—expensive. And he watched for the van that held the Tango Bear. A voice crackled through the trumpet-shaped metal loudspeakers up the poles.

"Hur-ry, hur-ry, hur-ry. The big show is about to begin in the main tent. Get your tick-ets now, folks." The voice was a rasp, the words a drone. "Thrills, spills, chills. Ac-ro-bats, clowns, wild animals, death-defying trap-eze acts. Perform-ing poo-dles from Par-ee Won-der-ful trained seals. See the two-ton Tango Bear. He'll dance for you. This isn't TV, folks. This is all real, hap-pen-ing live before your ve-ry eyes. Don't miss it. You'll never for-give yourself. The ticket office is now open at the end of the midway. Hur-ry, hur-ry hur-ry. Get your tick-ets now . . ."

The background of the highway as he viewed it was thick pinewood climbing slopes. Dark. Out of the darkness loomed the van, lumbering along toward the big tent. Bohannon rose and watched. Lettering showed up on the side of the truck as it came into the light: THE TANGO BEAR. Bohannon started for the midway. The voice blared on from the loudspeakers. "Hur-ry, hur-ry, hur-ry." He took the advice, pressing through the crowd, trying not to jar his sore shoulder and not always avoiding it. He wanted to reach Pancho before the man was joined by his two-ton, ten-foot-tall friend.

He jammed for a minute in the crowd around the ticket truck. H

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was told to watch who he was shoving and was himself shoved. He tripped over a tent stake and sprawled. Pain from his shoulder immobilized him for a moment. Then he used a bristly guy rope to haul himself to his feet. And in that instant, he glimpsed Williams in a seersucker suit at the far end of the midway. He was hobbling toward Bohannon as fast as he could on his shiny crutches. Bohannon wanted to talk to him, but he'd better get to Pancho first. He jogged around the tent to where the animal vans stood in the dark.

The rear doors of the Tango Bear truck were not open like the rest. He banged on them. The bear grunted and shuffled inside. Bohannon looked into the cab of the van. No Pancho. A tent flap let out a triangle of light. He stepped inside. The freckle-faced girl was in a spangled white costume now, a tiara in her red hair. She didn't look the same. Her fairy godmother had been here. Bohannon envied the prince. The girl had blanketed the llamas in red-and-blue velvet with rhinestones and crowned the zebras with silver-and-black plumes. She blinked sparkly false eyelashes at Bohannon.

"I heard Pancho's truck," she said. "Where is he?"

"That's what I was going to ask you," Bohannon said.

"Go find him," she said, "and tell him to get in here."

"Maybe he's with Williams," Bohannon said and went out into the dark.

But now he had lost Williams. Williams hadn't joined the friendly folk around the window of the ticket truck. Bohannon started up the midway, eyeing the dwindling crowd. Williams wasn't pitching baseballs, throwing darts, or buying chances on a number on the big wheel. He wasn't frowning in concentration at the controls of an electronic game, nor among the jumping kids at the high, hot, greasy counters of the food trucks. Bohannon cut around behind the rows of tents, striding along through shadow and light, squinting into the dark slots between the tents. Nothing on the west side. He tried the east, the merry-go-round music in his ears.

The rear window of a food truck slapped open and a bucket was emptied just in front of him. The window slapped shut. He muttered and brushed at his splashed pantslegs. He walked on—and saw movement between two booths in a space scarcely wide enough for a man. Light from a pole glared down into his eyes. He shaded them with his hand, and saw a thick-set man, back turned, crouching in the dark. Bohannon opened his mouth to call out and then said nothing. The man held a rifle. Light from the midway beyond him

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slid along its barrel. Bohannon caught the noise of a round being jacked into the chamber, and he knew the gun was his Winchester.

He eased himself between the canvas walls and smelled the bear smell. He tried to make no sound, stepping with care in case there were objects to fall over. He kept his eyes on the man, until the man lifted the gun to his shoulder to aim it, then Bohannon looked for the target.

Across the bright midway, Williams stood, holding a burrito that leaked chili sauce onto its paper wrapper. He was talking to a slight man with a neatly trimmed grey beard, who looked out of place at a carnival. *Distinguished* would be the easy word for him. His attitude seemed urgent.

"Hold it, Pancho," Bohannon said. "Don't shoot."

Pancho glanced over his shoulder, panic in his eyes, then turned back and fired the rifle. Bohannon lunged at him and got him in a choke hold. But Pancho dug a thick elbow into Bohannon's bound arm. Pain shot through Bohannon's shoulder and he fell back. Pancho scrambled over him, a boot scraping Bohannon's cheekbone, another boot kicking off from Bohannon's stomach. Gasping, sick, Bohannon staggered to his feet and lurched toward the rear of the slot. Light glared in his eyes again. He couldn't see Pancho. And this time he didn't hear him running off. A motorcycle engine sputtered to life and its lights flicked on. Bohannon ran for it. But it jumped away, jouncing out of the light across the meadow toward the dark highway.

See him ride a motorcycle. Not tonight.

There was turmoil around the burrito truck. The fat brown woman who ran it wept loudly in Spanish. A skinny, blond youngster in a white coat hung over the counter like a broken marionette. His starchy little white cap lay trampled in the grass and his blood dripped on it. Ambulance attendants climbed into the truck and got the boy out and onto a gurney, a blanket over him, plasma leaking into his arm from a plastic pouch. He was pale but breathing. Bohannon prayed the bullet had done him no mortal harm. The gurney slid with a clatter into the ambulance, the doors slammed, and together Bohannon and Gerard, in tan sheriff's uniform, watched the ambulance rock slowly off down the midway, its siren moaning softly to warn people out of its track.

"He was aiming," Bohannon said, "at a man named Williams." He described Williams to Gerard. "He should be easy to find."

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"What's the connection?" Gerard said.

"I don't know. The girl who looks after the animals"—Bohannon pointed at the big tent—"you might ask her. She said Pancho was scared of Williams. Maybe she knows why."

"He stole your rifle last night," Gerard said. He was studying the way Bohannon's left arm was strapped across his middle, the way Bohannon's sleeve hung empty. "Did he shoot you with it first?"

"Used it for a club," Bohannon said. "If he'd shot, he would have hit somebody else, wouldn't he?"

"He's no marksman," Gerard admitted. "Why would he come clear up there to steal a rifle? Are you leveling with me?"

"It's what happened," Bohannon said. "He brought his van with the bear in it. Panicked my horses. He climbed the pole and cut off the electricity. Why? Ask him. That's not much of a motorcycle. He shouldn't be hard to catch up to."

From the big tent came the noise of a small band, bass drum, cymbals, sousaphone, a trumpet, a trombone, a piccolo. They were making a try at "The Entrance of the Gladiators," but it didn't sound as if they were going to finish together. Bohannon would have liked to see the show. Particularly the red-haired girl, whatever she did. But he was too tired. He said to Gerard:

"Can I go home now?"

"You should have reported the rifle stolen," Gerard said.

"Yeah, yeah," Bohannon said, and limped away.

It was another clear, dry morning. Everyone was at the pine table in the kitchen eating breakfast—the girl, too. The sound of a car coming into the yard made her stand up and start hopping for the hall doorway. She had her plate in her hand and the fork on it rattled at every hop. Aching all over, Bohannon went to the kitchen door and looked out. The car was a Sheriff's Department vehicle and Gerard was already out of it and striding along the porch, the Winchester in his hands. When he saw Bohannon holding the screen door open, he lifted the rifle and asked, "This yours?"

"Yes. Come in." Bohannon stood aside. Gerard entered the kitchen and stopped, looking at the girl with her plate in one hand and the other arm in a sling. "My niece," Bohannon said. "Lieutenant Gerard." He let the screen door close.

Gerard nodded to the girl. "Like a hospital around here."

"She fell off a horse," Bohannon said. "Breakfast?"

"Coffee, if you can spare it." Gerard pulled out a chair at the table

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and sat down. He said to Stubbs and Rivera, "Gentlemen." He said to Bohannon, who brought the blue pot from the stove, "He wasn't hard to catch, because he stopped."

Bohannon poured coffee and glanced at the girl. He wanted her out of the room, and he jerked his head. The problem was she couldn't open the door with the plate in her hand. He set the pot down, opened the door for her, shut it after her, and came back to the table. He asked Gerard, "What did he tell you?"

"Nothing. He's dead. Left the motorcycle on the road shoulder and jumped off a two-hundred-foot cliff. Maybe he meant to hit the ocean. He hit the rocks. You know the place. Bull sea lions loaf around down there, bellowing. There's a good echo." Gerard dug in a starchy shirt pocket and brought out a note. "Stuck under the motorcycle brake lever." Bohannon took it. It was in Spanish and it said that Pancho was sorry to have killed the young man in the food truck. He asked forgiveness. Bohannon knew how he felt.

"The boy he shot," Bohannon said. "He's not dead?"

"He'll be fine." Gerard took back the note and laid photographs out on the table—color snapshots of a plumpish young woman and four young children, washed, combed, and in their Sunday best. "These were in Pancho's wallet." He turned one of them over. "See that rubber stamp?" Bohannon saw it—the name of a camera shop in Havana. Gerard said, "He had a Mexican passport and a green card, but he'd bought them someplace, fakes. The CIA has his fingerprints. He's a Cuban, not a refugee—a Castro man, in this country illegally." Gerard gathered up the snapshots. "Maybe Williams knew that and was blackmailing him or something."

"Can't you find Williams?" Stubbs said.

"He never lights for long." Gerard pushed the note and snapshots into his shirt pocket. "He's stayed at three different motels in the area in the past three days. Only once was he Williams. He was Johnson first, then Freeman. When he rented that compact, he was Barnes. No such address."

Rivera said, "What will happen to the poor bear?"

"The San Francisco zoo is sending a man and a truck," Gerard said. "Meantime, he's a prisoner in cell eighteen."

Gerard drank his coffee and left. Rivera went to muck out stalls, Stubbs to coach a pair of young girls in low jumps inside the white rail paddock. Bohannon cleared the table, set the soiled dishes in the sink, went along the hall to collect the girl's plate. It lay on the

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chest of drawers. She herself sat in a stiff rocker and reproached him with her eyes. "You weren't going to notify the sheriff."

"It wasn't about you," he said, "it was about my rifle. The man who came after you stole it. I went to get it back. There's a carnival in town. He worked for the carnival." Bohannon picked up her plate. "He had a trained-bear act. Did you ever see it? The Tango Bear?"

She shook her head. She seemed honestly puzzled.

"He tried to kill somebody with my rifle." Bohannon gazed out the window down the canyon. "A man who calls himself Williams. Badly crippled up. Walks with aluminum crutches." Bohannon looked at the girl. "Him I think you do know."

She shook her head again, but too quickly this time, and fear showed in her eyes.

"He scares you senseless, he got me beaten up, and he got a college boy shot at the carnival."

"I never wanted that," she said sharply.

"Then put a stop to it," Bohannon said. "Tell me what it's all about. Worse can happen. It already has. Tell me."

"I can't." It was a desperate cry and tears ran down her scratched face. "You're lovely and kind and caring, and I want to tell you, because I know you'd understand. But I can't." She wiped at her tears with thin fingers. Her laugh was despairing. "That sounds stupid, doesn't it?"

"The Tango Bear man is dead," Bohannon said gravely. "When he couldn't get you out of here, when he couldn't kill the man on crutches, he killed himself. He had four small children and a wife back in Cuba. He's dead. Now let me put it to you—whose fault is that?"

She reddened. "That's a terrible thing to say."

"It's a terrible thing to happen," he said.

"It isn't my fault." She jumped up. "Look—lend me money. Drive me to Fresno, the airport. I'll go. You won't have to worry about me any more."

"I'll worry about you anyplace but right here."

"They wouldn't find me," she said. "They'd give up."

"Pancho didn't kill himself because Mr. Crutches is somebody who gives up." Bohannon opened the door. "You stay here till I can stop him, okay?" He turned back. "A slim, distinguished-looking man with a neat grey beard. Does he mean anything to you?"

She turned away, shaking her head. "Please. You have to stop asking me questions. No—I don't know him."

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"You're a liar," Bohannon said, and left the room, shutting the door behind him.

Sorenson knew him. Sorenson showed up in a bright-red fire-patrol car at noon. He and Bohannon had been young deputy sheriffs together. When he came into the kitchen, he found Bohannon at the table, working on accounts payable with an electronic calculator. A very old portable typewriter was at Bohannon's elbow, for writing checks and, later in the day, granted the luck, tapping out bills. At the other side of the table, Stubbs used a Blackwing pencil on a Strathmore drawing tablet. He would make a few lines, lift the pencil, look at Bohannon.

"Pale eyes," Bohannon muttered, scowling over the little white keys of the machine. "Blue or hazel. Pale, anyway."

Stubbs drew for a minute and held up the pad. "This him?"

Bohannon said, "What?" impatiently, then looked up and eyed the drawing critically. "More hair. He's got a good head of hair for a man his age—for a man of any age. That's about it, except for the hair."

Sorenson rattled the aluminum screen door. And Bohannon noticed him at last. Stubbs turned around on his chair. Sorenson had a long, horsy face and an aw-shucks smile. "It's hot out there. Thought you might spare me a beer. Been driving around trying to get people to cut back their brush. No rain in sight yet. Getting drier every day."

"Help yourself," Bohannon said and bent over his bills again. Stubbs's pencil whispered on the rough paper. Sorenson opened the refrigerator, found a brown bottle, closed the refrigerator, and, twisting the top off the bottle, ambled to the table, a gangly man. He peered over Stubbs's shoulder. "Hey, that's very good," he said, and rattled chair legs on the planks and sat down. "What's it for?"

"Rivera's going to take it down to the carnival," Stubbs said, "and see if anybody there can identify him."

Sorenson's eyebrows went up. "You mean you drew that without even knowing who he is?"

"From Hack's description." Stubbs held the pad up to study it. "Never tried it before. Came out all right."

"It's a work of art." Sorenson tilted up the bottle and drank half its contents. He set the bottle down with a sigh. "Ah, that hits the spot." He took the pad from Stubbs and admired the drawing. "You going to give it to him?"

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"If he wants it." Stubbs shrugged. "If we can find him."

Sorenson gave back the pad. "Try Solar Research Labs."

Bohannon stopped shuffling papers. "Up on the ridge?"

"He works there." Sorenson picked up the bottle, swallowed beer again, and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Dr. Farquar. I meet him on the road pretty often. Drives a big new Mercedes. Hard to miss. Always smiles and waves. Nice fellow."

"We'll see," Bohannon said.

It was the far ridge, the one that separated the cool of the coast from the heat of the inland valley. The buildings were plain white, big tilted saucers and dark, sun-drinking slabs mounted on the roofs. Chainlink fence surrounded the place, topped by curls of razor wire. A severe signboard read SOLAR RESEARCH INSTITUTE and in smaller letters gave information about whatever government agency in Washington, D.C., had charge of it. Uniformed soldiers stood outside the gates with guns, and inside the gates with guns. Signs fastened to the gates said ADMITTANCE RESTRICTED—U.S. GOVERNMENT INSTALLATION. Bohannon stopped the pickup at a white plywood kiosk by the gates. It was a day for meeting old friends. Ruhrig looked out at him, a retired deputy.

"Hack," he said. "You got permission to go inside?"

"I didn't know I needed it," Bohannon said.

Ruhrig took off his security-guard cap and wiped sweat off his bald dome with a puffy hand. He smiled sadly. "You gotta have clearance, Hack. This here is a top-secret outfit. You gotta fill out forms. They gotta be cleared with the Defense Department." He peered with bleary blue eyes. "You ever kiss a girl? Ever pee outdoors? No way a man of your depraved character will ever get in here."

"I just want to see Dr. Farquar," Bohannon said. "Don't they allow visitors?"

"You want to visit," Ruhrig said, "guess they figure you can visit after work hours."

"Do you know Farquar?" Bohannon said. "When does he get off work? I'll wait out here."

"He didn't come in today. Yesterday, either."

Bohannon dug out his wallet, and from it took a business card. "Can you get this to his secretary or somebody? I want him to call me." He reached out the pickup window. "Let me have a pen." Ruhrig found a pen on an untidy shelf inside the kiosk and handed it to

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Bohannon. Bohannon wrote *Urgent!* on the back of the card. He passed card and pen to Ruhrig. "If he shows up or telephones in to his office, maybe they'll put him in touch with me."

"I'll send it inside," Ruhrig said. He read what Bohannon had written. "What's it about?"

"I wish I knew," Bohannon said. "Maybe he'll tell me."

A shadow fell across Ludlow's apple orchards, taking the shine from the leaves and the young fruit. Bohannon frowned up through the dusty windshield. Sure enough. Wind was moving clouds in from the ocean. He gave a little smile. With luck, the dry spell was about to end. Sorenson could stop worrying about people cutting back their dry brush and Bohannon could stop worrying about his horses. Taking the long loop of rising trail around the little valley, he watched the cloud shadows cross sloping grassland, where stocky whiteface cattle browsed.

The road began a steeper climb. He shifted gears. The mossy oaks and shadowy creek of the canyon bottom dropped away, the apple orchard, the grazing cattle, the coolness. He was in rock and dry brush country now, and the sun glared hot through the windshield. The windshield spiderwebbed. A bullet plunked into the seatback beside him. He ducked. It was a no-good reflex. His foot searched for the brake pedal. Another no-good reflex. He didn't want to stop. If you were going to be a target, be a moving target. He crouched over the wheel, gripping it with the only good hand he had, and he throttled the old pickup hard, weaving from side to side of the narrow road.

This time he heard the slap of the gun. So the bullet had missed him. The next bullet spanged off the metal of the truck bed before he heard the gunshot. The road made a sharp angle. He braked for a second, then hit the throttle hard. Roadside dust swirled up. The right rear wheel almost went over. Then the road topped out. He could see well from here. He risked slowing for a minute to take a look. At first the world looked empty of anyone but him. Then sunlight winked off glass. He dimly heard the slam of a car door. He located it, among scrub oak on a rise—the beige compact. The noise of its four little cylinders starting reached him on the quiet air. The car lurched down toward the road.

Bohannon jumped out of the pickup, lifted the seat, dug a hammer from among rusty tools there, and knocked a hole in the crackled windshield glass so he could see to drive. He put hammer and seat

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back, scrambled into the cab, kicked off the floor what loose glass he could, and slammed the door. He let go the handbrake and drove on. He knew these canyons, every twist and tack. He would soon lose Williams.

To sneak home by crooked back trails would waste time, but he would arrive breathing. The girl had made breathing important to him again. She needed him. He had just begun to grasp why. And how much. The clouds blocked out the sun now. Their whiteness began to smudge. The wind took on a cold, damp edge. He hoped a storm was the worst that was going to happen tonight. But he didn't believe it.

It was bad enough. By four-thirty rain fell heavily. It brought night early to Rodd Canyon. Stubbs herded the last of the horses down from the pasture in near dark. A rubber poncho had kept the old man from getting too wet, but nothing had done that for the horses. It was an hour before Stubbs and Rivera had dried them off and closed the doors on the last of the box stalls, and come into the kitchen where the girl sat and watched Bohannon cook. He had told her about Williams shooting out his windshield.

"If you get rid of me, he'll stop," she said. "Take me where I can get a plane."

"They won't be flying tonight," Bohannon said.

Thunder crashed, lightning flared, the wind rose and grew hoarse, shaking the ranch house. In the middle of supper, the lights went out. After supper, Bohannon took the girl to her room with a kerosene lamp. He locked the window, drew the curtains, and left her with Rivera, the rifle, and chess pieces set out on a little table between them. Stubbs hurried back to the stables.

Bohannon washed the dishes by lamplight, set out files and forms on the table, and began to type statements, leaning close to the old portable to read what he typed. It was nearly eight by his watch when the screen-door hinges creaked and knuckles rapped the wooden door. Bohannon went and pulled it open. Farquar stood there in a pale fly-front raincoat, rain-darkened on the shoulders. Rain dripped from the brim of his waterproof hat and from his neat grey beard.

"You wanted to see me?" he said.

"Come in," Bohannon said. Cold wet air blew in with the man. The doorway lit up with a lightning flash. Bohannon closed the door.

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Thunder split the sky overhead. Bohannon said, "Let me take your coat. Sit down."

Farquar shook his head, read his watch. "I'll stand, thank you. I'm running late. What is this about?"

"A man with crippled legs who calls himself Williams." Bohannon got the Old Crow from a shadowy cupboard and brought the bottle and two glasses to the table. "He tried to kill me today. I thought you could explain why."

Farquar looked around at the gently lamplit room. "What would make you think that?"

"You were talking to Williams last night at the carnival. By the burrito truck. When there was a shooting, you and Williams vanished. Together. Who is he, Dr. Farquar?"

"I'm afraid you've mistaken me for someone else."

"If that were so," Bohannon said, "you wouldn't be here. Sit down. Have a drink. It's a good night for it. Why did Williams come here the other morning to scout my place? Why did he send someone to break in here that night? Why did that same messenger then try to kill Williams at the carnival, and having failed to do that"—Bohannon poured whiskey—"kill himself? I'm talking about Pancho, the bear trainer."

Farquar was silent. Bohannon looked at him. Farquar's paleness and startlement were plain even in the poor light. He took hold of a chair back as if to steady himself. He said faintly, hoarsely, "Dear God. You've got her. Here." He looked over his shoulder and he was afraid. He stepped around the table and the hand that he laid on Bohannon's shoulder trembled. "Where is she? Bring her to me at once."

"Not 'How is she?' " Bohannon handed him a glass. "She broke an arm and sprained an ankle jumping out of your car over yonder the other night. Wonder is she wasn't killed." Dumbly Farquar accepted the glass. Bohannon raised his. "Here's to fatherly concern. She is your daughter, right? She's got your eyes. Down to the fear in them."

"You're wasting time." Farquar set his glass down and headed for the inner door. "Jennifer? Where are you?" He opened the door and shouted along the hall. "It's Daddy. Please be reasonable now. You must come with me."

"Where?" Bohannon stood behind him.

"To Europe. I've been appointed to a fine position there." He pulled airline tickets from a pocket and waved them helplessly. "She doesn't want to go."

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"Emphatically," Bohannon said, and saw light fall into the hall from her room. She came out, stood for a moment staring, then hobbled slowly toward her father. "I won't," she said. "You know I won't."

Farquar said, "But Williams will kill you."

"Why would he do that?" Bohannon said.

"It could all have been so simple." Farquar sounded ready to weep. "Why wouldn't you just come quietly? Now it's turned to a matter of life and death."

"It was always that." She put her arms around him, kissed his cheek, pushed away from him. "You go. You'll be all right. You'll have what you wanted."

"But there's no reason why you—" he began. And stopped with a small cry. Williams came out the door from the girl's room. He had the Winchester clutched under his arm. "Young ladies Jennifer's age," he said, in a country-western twang, "don't always take to what's reasonable."

"That's no excuse to murder them!" Farquar cried.

"He doesn't need excuses," Bohannon said. "It's his way of life. What's it about, Mr. Johnson-Freeman-Williams-Barnes? If you think she's given away your secret, you're mistaken. She hasn't said one word."

Short legs scuffling on the boards, big shoulders heaving, Williams came on with a grin and a chuckle. "You just didn't ask the right questions. There's folks who know how." He jerked the rifle barrel at them. "Get in the kitchen, please? Where we can all be comfortable?" The thunder cracked again, echoing down the canyon. Williams told Bohannon's back, "You serve up some weather here."

"It's my father's secret," Jennifer said. "I won't betray my father. Even though I think he's wrong. But you can't understand that, can you? You can go your way in peace, Mr. Williams. So can he."

"I like to be very sure," Williams said. "Sit down." She sat. He stood. "Dr. Farquar, you are not going to be on flight 709 to Berlin if you don't start pretty soon. San Francisco's quite a drive in the rain."

"Let me take her," Farquar begged.

"Get a move on, Doctor," Williams said softly.

"No. Not without Jennifer." Farquar dug frantically in his coat. "I won't leave her here to die." A little black revolver was in his hand. He caught the girl's wrist and brought her up off her chair. He backed toward the kitchen door, she hobbling beside him, eyes

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wide with fear in the lamplight. She looked terribly young. Williams fumbled with the rifle. Bohannon blew out the lamp.

The rifle blazed. Its explosion was deafening. Bohannon dropped to the floor. The kitchen door opened. A gust of wet wind blew across the floor. Lightning flashed, and by its glare Bohannon located Williams, who was struggling to cock the gun again. "Run like hell!" Bohannon shouted, lunged low at Williams, and knocked his crutches from under him. The man fell. The rifle clattered. Bohannon groped for it, found it, tottered to his feet. Williams got a grip on Bohannon's ankle. The man was strong. Bohannon used the rifle the only way he could with one bad arm, the way Pancho had used it on him—as a club.

He wheeled a rented car into the yard at sundown two days later, switched off its engine, and sat looking at the place—the long low-roofed white stables, the fences, the trees, the browsing horses in the meadows newly greened by the rain. He was grateful to be back. He got stiffly out of the car and breathed the fresh air deeply. The smell of law-enforcement buildings was about all he'd breathed for forty-eight hours. From San Luis to Sacramento, where the CIA had offices. He knocked heels along the porch and opened the kitchen screen door. Stubbs was at the stove.

"Not turkey hash again," Bohannon said.

"You hurt my feelings," Stubbs said. "It's beef stew."

Rivera rose from the table to fetch a plate and eating utensils for Bohannon. The boy looked pale. His head was bandaged. When he had risen to follow the girl out of the room after she'd heard her father's voice, Williams had hit him from behind. "I am ashamed," he said.

"Forget it." Bohannon sat down. "Bring me a glass with ice and the whiskey, all right? And I'll tell you all about it. I don't want any questions. I've done nothing but answer questions ever since I left." He sighed, lit a cigarette, and took the glass and bottle Rivera brought. "And I'll have to answer them all over again down the line when there's a trial." He poured himself a drink.

"Who's Williams?" Stubbs said. "A Roosky spy?"

"Don't do that," Bohannon said. "Just listen. Williams works for Williams. Near as I can gather, anyplace and everyplace in the world. He's a broker. He buys and sells."

"Secrets? Did Farquar pass him some kind of new weapon they been working on up at that solar-research place?"

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"There you go again," Bohannon said. "Yes, but not for cash. For an ideal. To save humanity. He figured if both sides had this new horror, there'd be a standoff. Williams arranged for that post in East Germany. Farquar had quietly settled his affairs here. He was just going to disappear."

Stubbs took large bowls out of a cupboard. "Only his daughter found out. That how it went?"

"And confronted him, tried to persuade him to turn Williams in. Farquar might be excused, then. He wouldn't listen. And now he said she had to leave with him. When she jumped and ran instead, he panicked and told Williams."

Stubbs ladled the bowls full of stew. "And Williams decided she had to be killed to keep her quiet. Couldn't manage it himself, so he sent the bear man. Why him?"

"Williams has a list of vulnerable people. Pancho was handy. Williams threatened his family back in Cuba."

Stubbs limped to the table and set down steaming bowls. "How's the girl? How did she take it?"

Bohannon had happened on her this morning in a courthouse corridor. She looked forlorn. He said, "Don't feel bad. You did what you thought was right. You did your best."

"It wasn't good enough," she said bleakly.

"It almost never is," Bohannon said.

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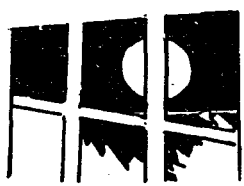

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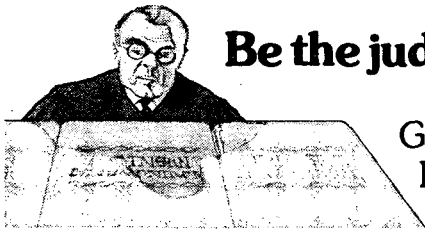

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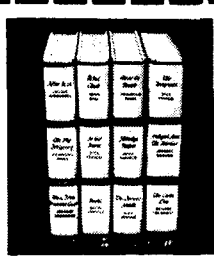

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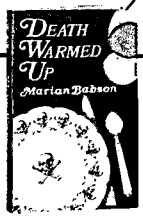

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